UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA

Improvising for Solo Jazz Guitar

A Whole-instrument Approach to Integrating Single-line and Polyphonic Concepts.

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Declaration

This exegesis contains the results of research carried out at the University of Tasmania, Conservatorium of Music between 2013 and 2017. It contains no material that, to my knowledge, has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information that is duly acknowledged in the exegesis. I declare that this exegesis is my own work and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where clear acknowledgement or reference has been made in the text. This exegesis may be made available for loan and limited copying in accordance with the Copyright Act 1968.

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Abstract

Historically within the jazz idiom, the guitar has predominantly functioned within ensembles of various sizes. A focus of this study is an investigation into the guitarist's potential to improvise completely unaccompanied, without the rhythmic security of drums or the harmonic and structural security of bass or piano. This requires not only a solid grounding in harmony, rhythm, and melody but also should incorporate integration of the melodic and accompaniment roles. This integration of roles is the key focus of this study. In jazz, the piano is the instrument most well-known for solo performance due to the obvious advantages of being able to play left and right hands independently. The guitar by comparison initially appears to have limited possibilities when played solo. This work seeks to find solutions for this problem as developed in my own practice through performance and reflective and investigative analysis; solutions that take advantage of the guitar's unique characteristics.

The outcomes of this research will be documented in a folio of three recorded solo performance recitals and an accompanying exegesis outlining the key findings based on analysis of these performances. The findings will outline solutions to the problems associated with solo guitar performance and address the integration of chordal and melodic playing as well as vital rhythmic, melodic, harmonic and textural concepts.

Preface

Improvising solo guitar is difficult, the guitar “falls between the cracks” of being a chordal instrument and a melodic instrument. The guitarist does not have the potential harmonic palette available to a pianist or the voice-like quality and melodic weight of the saxophone or trumpet. The guitar does have however, its own inherent expressive melodic qualities and a unique chordal language that makes it ideal for solo improvised performance, despite the apparent restrictions. The challenge in solving these problems in a musical way, that allows the performer freedom of expression, whilst providing the listener with a complete and varied experience is the focus of this study.

My unique style of jazz guitar playing, based on a conceptual approach developed over many years, has led me to investigate a question that has become ubiquitous in the field. “Why do jazz improvisers on guitar separate and compartmentalize their chordal and melodic thinking?” My experience has been that the more I can integrate these aspects of my playing the more successful I can be as both a solo improviser and as an ensemble member, especially in situations where the guitar is providing the harmonic and chordal texture.

Guitarists have historically tended to favour or pragmatically fulfil one of two roles. The approaches can loosely be termed “chordal” or “melodic”. In popular and rock/blues music styles these roles are often referred to as “rhythm” and “lead”, often due to different playing circumstances or particular stylistic traits of the music. Many guitarists tend to temporarily or even permanently focus on one role, for example rhythm guitarist with the Count Basie orchestra, Freddie Green. Green provided harmonic and rhythmic support for the Basie band which became the standard guitar role in the pre-electric guitar big band. Specialising in this style of rhythm guitar would naturally lead players to become focused on the chordal aspect of the guitar. Guitarist Grant Green was a prolific presence on the recordings of Blue Note records throughout the 1960s. Green’s playing was influenced by saxophone players and unlike Freddie Green, he rarely played any chords, instead choosing to concentrate on horn-like single line improvising. Even on his 1961 trio release *Green Street* where Green is the only chordal instrument, he rarely plays anything more than a two-note chord, instead relying on the phrasing, tone and time feel of his linear improvising to create interest.

There is another approach to the instrument that is generally regarded as predominantly the realm of classical guitarists (with the requisite pre-composed repertoire). This solo approach is aided by repertoire that is arranged or written with the idiosyncrasies of the guitar in mind. Improvising players who wish to play solo or at least potentially combine the dual roles, often approach the problem by becoming adept at arranging. In some cases, players develop a conceptual framework for

approaching the task of realising the functionary demands of this combined style while being free to include either small or larger improvisatory excursions. It is in this latter category that my own professional practice has developed.

This study does not seek to critique or pronounce value judgements on the work of predominantly melodic or chordal focused players, rather it is an exploration and investigation of my own processes as I endeavour to develop a unique and functional style that combines chordal and melodic playing in an improvisatory context.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

There is a large range of literature broadly relating to musical improvisation, however, the focused nature of this project is more beneficially informed by a defined set of sources which can be grouped into three categories:

1. Musical and instructional works from artists that have in a broad sense contributed to or informed my own style of conceptual framework and range of techniques

2. Guitar methodologies or instructional works from these artists

3. Recorded works of other artists who have taken a different approach to this performance problem.

Broad Focus Works

There has been much written about improvisation in a broad sense. Works such as Berliner's "Thinking in Jazz" (1994), Stephen Nachmanovitch's "Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art" (2002) and "Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music" (1993) by Derek Bailey deal with larger conceptual issues. This study is not concerned with articulating or challenging accepted notions of the nature of improvisation and as such these works are useful in a contextual sense only.

More apposite are a range of primary source materials drawn from artist interviews and biographical accounts.

"The Guitar in Jazz" (1996) by J. Sallis contains various biographical and historical accounts of players with some insightful comments from players in various interviews. This text is of use as it is guitar specific, although most of the players involved can be categorised as either chord players *or* single line players, with the exception of Ralph Towner who discusses interesting ideas, although distances himself from the term "jazz" and approaches the guitar more from a compositional rather than improvisational angle.

> *In addition to my classically styled technique, the music that I'm playing is very keyboard-oriented. I treat the guitar like a piano trio; if I'm playing alone, it's almost a one-man band approach. There'll be the melodist, the inner voices, and the bass voice. I seldom run these voices through really simultaneously, although that's the illusion. Each part of the music gets my attention as it's going by. For example, if I play something melodically, I'll try to hang it over. If I start an inside voice beneath the melody, I'll hold the melody; I won't stop it and then start the inside voice. The melody gets hung over, and then I go onto the next part. The attention of the listener or the player flows more easily.* (Towner, in Sallis 1996: 185)

There are a number of relevant biographical accounts of important musicians. As the piano playing of Bill Evans has been an influence on my practice I found the biography by Peter Pettinger "Bill Evans: How My Heart Sings" (1998) to be useful in terms of Evans' approach to accompanying and harmony. The autobiography of Miles Davis, co-written by Quincy Troupe "Miles, The Autobiography" (1989)

contains insightful information, particularly as Davis worked with several notable guitarists in the later part of his career, he states, “I felt that two guitarists with different styles would create a tension that would be good for the music. I also felt that if Mike [Stern] listened to John [Scofield], then he might learn something about understatement.” (Davis, 1989: 354) Davis also offers his candid opinions of guitar players in general, with comments like, “White guitar players (at least most of them) can't play rhythm guitar.” (Davis, 1989: 329)

Downbeat magazine is a long running American jazz publication which is a resource for interviews with artists, reviews and general jazz news. Two interviews with Jim Hall in 1962 and 1965 are especially revealing as they are conducted during and immediately after Hall’s time with tenor saxophonist Sonny Rollins’ quartet. I will be using examples from the Rollins album *The Bridge* (1962) throughout the course of this study. Hall pre-empts some of the core material in this study by stating in Don Nelsen’s 1965 interview, “I would like to see it [the guitar] played more in a piano style, a more original and balanced combination of single-line and chord improvisation,” he said. “Tal [Farlow] and Wes Montgomery have done quite a bit in this direction, but it should be taken farther.” (Hall, 1965 in Nelsen)

Interviews with current musicians in other publications such as *Guitar Player* magazine can provide a direct insight into the thought processes of guitarists. *Guitar Player* is mostly a rock-based journal but has occasional interviews with jazz

guitarists. Relevant to this study is Bill Milkowski's interview with Kurt Rosenwinkel, Jimmy Leslie's interview with Charlie Hunter, Barry Cleveland's interview with Mimi Fox and Matt Elder's Jimmy Bruno interview.

Fernando Benadon's 2006 article in the journal "Ethnomusicology" "Slicing the Beat: Jazz Eighth-Notes as Expressive Micro-rhythm" quantifies the subtle but vital rhythmic language "hidden" in the playing of different musicians from different periods in jazz. The basic rhythm of the phrases he analysed were all quaver based and in traditional notation these phrases would have all been notated in exactly the same way but by using modern software he was able to accurately measure what was previously described in potentially subjective language.

Guitar-Specific Method Books

As indicated previously, in jazz, the guitar's role is most often a dichotomous one. It can be a melodic "front-line" instrument, playing a similar role to other single-line melodic instruments such as the saxophone or trumpet, or a rhythm section instrument accompanying soloists and providing the chordal texture. Most players gravitate towards one side of this equation, most commonly the single-line soloistic style, as a result of advances in amplification and the acceptance of the electric guitar in the generally acoustic based jazz tradition. However, in order for a soloist to negotiate the often-complex harmony of some jazz compositions, players must have a thorough harmonic grounding. Even when playing strictly single-line solos, players

must be aware of all the underlying harmonic nuances, so it is important for the guitarist to combine the learning of chordal and melodic skills. Chordal knowledge assists in the learning of linear material such as scales and arpeggios and knowledge of arpeggios and scales assists in the learning of chordal material. If these elements are separated and compartmentalised then it becomes very difficult to implement many of the core concepts discussed in this study, such as melodic chords, harmonic melody and the integration of chordal and melodic playing. Not only does learning the chordal and melodic material together make sense from an educational perspective, it also enhances the student's ability to cope with the variety of ensemble situations that they may face. Modern jazz guitarists often find themselves in an ensemble situation where they are the main chordal instrument, fulfilling the role traditionally supplied by the piano. The piano is at an advantage, in that the player naturally separates chordal (left hand/accompaniment) and single line (right hand/linear/melodic). The guitarist however, needs to achieve a similar result using just the one fretting hand.

On guitar, the tasks of accompaniment and melody playing are not as able to be delineated, as there isn't the advantage of assigning these roles to different hands, forcing the guitarist to mix chords and melody together as the one basic idea.

The majority of teaching methods have been slow to recognise this problem of integration, as methods are usually aimed at either developing chordal playing or single line playing, as the following list of titles demonstrates.

Barry Galbraith's "13 Chord Melody Arrangements for Solo Guitar" (2002) are a set of etudes with an intrinsic musicality that have an improvised quality about them,

devoid of meaningless virtuosity. The melody is the focus of the arrangements and there are many interesting harmonic ideas but the complexity is never at the expense of the melody. These pieces were not written to be a definitive collection; the published work of 13 pieces is part of a larger collection of 42 arrangements gathered and shared amongst past students of Galbraith.

Galbraith's other work focused on chordal playing is "The Comping Book" (1986). This work is an exception to most chordally based comping methods as Galbraith constantly pays attention to the melodic line of the top notes in his chord voicings, making this work very relevant to the melodic chordal concept. This book is more organised and focused than his chord melody collection, it is a series of examples of how Galbraith would comp[1] on a series of (renamed) standard tunes. For example, 'Rhythm 2' (based on the harmonic scheme George Gershwin's 1930 composition 'I've Got Rhythm') is fully functional as a harmonic and rhythmic accompaniment but also attention is paid to making the comp melodic. 'Sole' (based on 'Body and Soul' (Green, 1930) is again functional and melodic.

Master guitarist and teacher Ike Isaacs had a broad early playing career based in Europe; he played with many European jazz musicians across a wide range of styles with players such as violinist Stephane Grappelli. He was also an open and

[1] "Comp" is a shortened form of the verb "to accompany", In jazz, comping takes on a more complex meaning than just accompanying a soloist; in addition to the soloist, a good comper will also be interacting with the other members of the rhythm section, developing rhythmic and harmonic ideas with the bass and drums.

communicative teacher, his pupils include British guitar virtuoso Martin Taylor and when in later life he relocated to Australia he was an influence on many Australian players, including myself. Isaacs' solo recording *Intimate Interpretations* (1991) is a showcase for his sophisticated harmonic language; amongst his written works there is a fine collection of original compositions "Guitar Moods" (1972) for solo guitar, particularly the piece "St Anne's Court". This composition gives players an introduction to call and response playing (chords first). The arrangement can be played as written as well as using the chordal "calls" with improvised responses.

Alan Kingstone applies some of pianist Barry Harris' harmonic ideas to guitar in "The Barry Harris Harmonic Method for Guitar" (1995) He outlines a relevant summary of "movers" and "hitters", comparing players who play chords in a moving, pianistic, voice leading style with players who "hit" chords as one-off, fixed shapes. Kingstone states that the "hitter" thinks of chords as being vertical and static, whereas the 'mover' thinks of "the places in between the chord symbols". (Kingstone, 1995: vii)

George Van Eps' three-volume work "Harmonic Mechanisms for Guitar" (1980) looks at organising the fret board in a thorough and logical way. Although Van Eps is generally focused on arranging rather than improvising, he is (like the Barry Harris method) addressing harmony not as static block chords but as moving, flexible sounds.

Other works of a strictly chordal nature include Mick Goodrick and Tim Miller's "Creative chordal harmony for guitar: using generic modality compression" (2010), Ted Greene's "Modern Chord Progressions" (1976) and his most comprehensive work "Chord Chemistry" (1981).

Even though Steve Kahn's "Contemporary Chord Khancepts" (1996) is entirely focused on chordal playing he states in the introduction, "NEVER view the left-hand aspect as "just a bunch of chords". The concept is to ALWAYS hear the top note of any chord as having melodic content" (Kahn, 1996: 5) Melodic chordal playing is one of the key concepts in this study and will be discussed throughout.

In addition to his esteemed chord books Barry Galbraith also contributes a single-line based work with his "Daily Exercises in the Melodic and Harmonic Minor Modes" (1979), these exercises show good movement over the fingerboard, with studies organised into harmonically based groups. With all such single line exercises, I mentally (or actually) "comp" when practising these pieces to orientate myself harmonically on the fingerboard, this helps with my harmonic melody concept.

Pat Martino bases his single line exercises around specific chord voicings in his book "Linear Expressions" (1983). He calls the combined chord voicing and melodic idea an "area of activity", neatly avoiding the much-criticised use of the word "shape" in guitar educational literature. Both Galbraith and Martino demonstrate clear harmonic intent behind their melodic, single-line ideas but never explicitly combine the two in

a melody plus accompaniment format. Other works of an exclusively single-line nature include Ted Greene's "Jazz Guitar: Single Note Soloing" (1986) and Steve Khan's "Pentatonic Khancepts" (1996).

In "The Advancing Guitarist" (1987) Mick Goodrick puts forward many interesting ideas. Of particular interest are his fingerboard mechanics, especially the first section on single string playing. Whilst neither exclusively chordal or melodic in nature Goodrick's work does not join the two together explicitly but has many useful and well thought out exercises and advice for guitarists at all stages of development.

Non-Guitar Specific Sources

As well as guitar specific works, there are a range of works for other instruments such as piano or non-instrument specific works relevant to this study. Wise Publications' book of Bill Evans' transcriptions, titled "Bill Evans: Jazz Piano" (1996) is a folio of transcriptions from his early trio recordings *Everybody Digs Bill Evans* (1959), *Portrait in Jazz* (1960) and *The Complete Village Vanguard Recordings* (1961). This is a relevant source as both hands are transcribed and it is a clear demonstration of Evans' melodic and harmonic concepts. Playing these piano transcriptions on guitar demonstrates how two note accompaniment voicings are sufficient to outline the harmony when combined with strong harmonically based melodies (noting that these are played with bass and drums). Evans' interpretation of 'Autumn Leaves' (Kosma 1945) is an excellent example. Another Evans concept that

is directly transferrable to the guitar is his use of quartal[2] voicings in the accompaniment of his composition 'Peri's Scope' (1960). It is common for Evans and many pianists to voice chords in thirds or closely voiced clusters, voicings based on these intervals can present guitarists with awkward left hand stretches. This piece is based on the common I-vi-ii-V chord progression and his melodic and functional two note quartal voicings fit well on the guitar.

"The Jazz Theory Book" (1995) by Mark Levine is a comprehensive method from a respected and experienced professional pianist. The approach is consequently piano based so from a guitarist's point of view this is challenging, but also provides a perspective of what is expected from a chordal instrument in the professional, modern playing environment. Levine's use of clear examples from major recordings is an overlooked and refreshing idea, allowing the student to hear concepts in context, engaging the ear.

Hal Galper's "Forward Motion: From Bach to Bebop: A Corrective Approach to Jazz Phrasing" (2003) is relevant for both ensemble and solo playing, his main idea of beat one of the bar being the final destination, not the start of a phrase is a practical concept with direct application to this study. Galper explains, "[Beat] one of the bar is not the first beat of the bar; it is the last beat of the bar. It is the beat to which melodic ideas

[2] Quartal voicings are chords built by stacking fourths rather than traditional chord voicings based on thirds. These voicings create a more ambiguous harmonic sound and are often used for non-functional or parallel harmonies.

are played toward and at which they end." (Galper, 2003:17) By comparing J.S. Bach and Louis Armstrong, Galper clearly states that there is a fundamental aspect to his concept that applies to all music, not just jazz. "What worked in Bach's time in Germany must also work in Armstrong's time in New Orleans." (Galper 2003:11)

Recordings: Guitar in Ensemble Format

Recordings are by far the most relevant resource to this study. Jazz has always been an aural tradition and aside from live performance, recordings are the main format for musicians to present their work. It is also important for me to hear the individual and innovative approaches guitarists and pianists have taken when combining chordal and melodic roles within the context of the music.

Although the scope of this study is solo guitar performance, there are recordings of guitarists playing in ensemble situations that provide useful and relevant insights into this work. There are clear examples of integrated melodic and polyphonic playing throughout the following recordings.

Tenor Saxophonist Sonny Rollins' recording *The Bridge* (1962) came after his self-imposed exile from recording and playing. This was an eagerly awaited recording and Rollins chose the unusual (for the time) line up of guitar, bass and drums for his rhythm section and perhaps even more importantly, given that Rollins was a

prominent figure in the African-American artistic community, he chose a young white guitar player, Jim Hall. He commented later that, "I guess the militant end of the black community-jazz community felt betrayed by me." (Rollins, 2015 in Nisenson: 182) He continues,

> *Well, all that flack didn't affect me. But as I look back, there was something that did really bother me. You see, whenever you have a white guy in your band and the black guy is the leader, you get treated funny. This was not the Jim Hall-Sonny Rollins band or the Sonny Rollins-Jim Hall band. It was the Sonny Rollins Quartet. That is not how we were treated by club owners and technicians……. They simply ignored me, treated me as if I were a sideman……. Maybe I felt more strongly about this because of the criticism I got from the black community (Rollins, 2015 in Nisenson: 188, 189)*

Hall was known for his playing in more open, less aggressive ensembles with Jimmy Guiffre and Chico Hamilton and despite the criticism and pressure, Rollins felt Jim Hall perfectly suited his concept at the time. Nisenson states:

> *The Bridge completely validates Sonny's choice of Jim Hall. Hall's solos seem to glow with warmth, and the pianist's* [sic] *sense of logic and economy, his ability to select just the right note, made him a perfect complement to Sonny's more garrulous style. This was undoubtedly one of Sonny's greatest groups, comparable in its way to such great jazz combos of the 1960s as the Coltrane quartet and Miles Davis' Hancock-Williams-Carter-Shorter quintet. (Nisenson, 2015: 186)*

Jim Hall's trio recording *Jim Hall Trio Live '74* demonstrates Hall's gentle, open and melodic approach to trio playing. His choice of standard repertoire allowed the group to play familiar material in a highly interactive way, this coupled with the more exploratory nature of a live recording allowed Hall the time and space to demonstrate his integrated chordal and melodic approach.

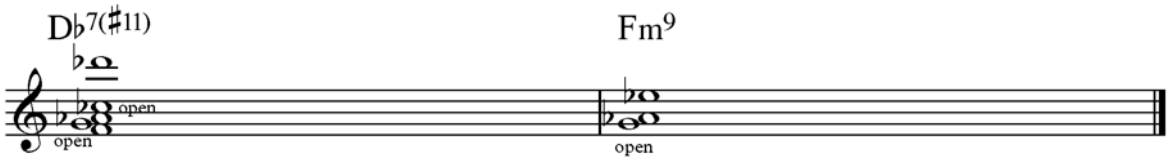
Kenny Burrell recorded many albums of which I will be referring in particular to two trio based recordings, *A Night at the Village Vanguard* recorded in 1959 and *Midnight Blue* recorded in 1963. On *Midnight Blue* a percussionist is added to the line-up. Burrell's improvising language is steeped in the blues; his call and response phrases with melodic "calls" and chordal "responses" are an example of a player coming up with their own solution for melodic and harmonic integration.

Modern guitarists Kurt Rosenwinkel and Peter Bernstein have both put their individual stamp on the guitar-led trio format; Kurt Rosenwinkel's *East Coast Love Affair* (1996) is an example of separating melody and chords and going for a more pianistic approach, Rosenwinkel states:

> *East Coast Love Affair was a good example of the beginnings of that for me. Now it's gotten to a point where melody and chords are much more integrated, whereas before they were very clearly separate things - there's the melody up top and then I'd go down and play some chords. (Rosenwinkel, 2010 in Mikowlski: 34)*

Peter Bernstein's 2008 recording *Peter Bernstein Trio Plays Monk* is also based on a pianistic concept; Bernstein comes up with some colourful and uniquely guitaristic solutions for Monk's dissonant close harmonies, by employing open strings. As shown in Figure 1 the D flat 7 sharp 11 using the open B (C flat) and G strings from 'Work' and the Fm9 voicing using the open G string from 'Let's Cool One'.

Fig 1.



The voice and guitar format is common throughout jazz history, some of the more influential recordings for this study are: the Joe Pass and Ella Fitzgerald duo recordings (4 in total), Julie London with Barney Kessel *Julie is Her Name* (1955) *Julie is Her Name, Vol.2* with Howard Roberts on guitar and Sheila Jordan's *Portrait of Sheila* (1963) with Barry Galbraith.

Recordings: Solo Guitar

Many early jazz guitarists included a solo work on their recordings in conjunction with accompanied or ensemble works, but full length solo recordings are rare. Most of the more solo oriented players such as Dick McDonough, George Barnes, George Van Eps and Carl Kress tended to record in the guitar duo format with the occasional heavily arranged solo piece. It wasn't until 1968 that George Van Eps recorded his

only full length all solo recording in *Soliloquy.* The landmark Joe Pass solo recording *Virtuoso* (1973) was followed by *Virtuoso 2* (1976), *Virtuoso 3* (1977) and *Virtuoso 4* (recorded in 1973 but not released until 1983). As the title suggests, these recordings are full of virtuosic playing and make a statement to the jazz world that the solo jazz guitar (in the right hands) is capable of enough content and variety to sustain interest throughout a full-length recording.

A recent solo recording of relevance to this study is Peter Bernstein's *Solo Guitar: Live at Smalls* (2012). It is the improvisatory nature of the pieces on this album that is of interest, there are very few pre-conceived arranged sections and Bernstein improvises integrated melody and accompaniment with great swing and feel.

Lenny Breau, a prodigious guitarist with an unorthodox technique perfectly suited to solo guitar recorded several solo albums including *5 O'clock Bells* (1979) and *Mo' Breau* (1981). Breau's solo improvising is of the highest level, he is able to improvise melodic lines with sustained accompaniment and play many polyphonic ideas previously out of reach for the guitar. Although there are many conceptual areas of interest for me with Lenny Breau's playing, his right-hand technique which is based on traditional classical right hand technique, utilising fingerpicks instead of fingernails is so different from mine that his work is beyond the scope of this study. Many other notable guitarists have recorded in the solo format including Barney Kessel *Solo* (1981), This was Kessel's only entirely solo recording, he was more widely acknowledged as an ensemble player and he takes a simple and clear approach

to the music presented on this album. British guitarist Martin Taylor is a virtuosic solo guitar specialist, his recordings *Live in Concert* (1988) and *Solo* (2002) are heavily arranged and include very little improvising but are full of solutions for the separation of accompaniment and melody. Ted Greene is well known as an educator and author, his only commercially released recording *Solo Guitar* (1977) is a showcase of his complex, pianistic arranging style. Greene plays a seven-string guitar and uses a wide range of extended techniques to further add range and depth the sound of the guitar.

These celebrated players of the more pianistic style of solo playing are predominantly finger-style players; which has distinct advantages over plectrum playing with regard to voicing and texture. Joe Pass, Martin Taylor, Lenny Breau and Ted Greene were able to play contrapuntal possibilities that are generally considered unplayable using a pick. However, finger style right hand technique falls down in the vital area of swing and variation of attack and articulation that I hear from plectrum players such as George Benson, Grant Green and John Scofield. This led me to develop a method for being able to swap between the two techniques as seamlessly as possible. There is no single fool-proof method for being able to have both styles available, hiding your pick somewhere in your right hand whilst playing finger style is always going to compromise your technique so I developed a method where my pick is held lightly between my index (*i*) and middle (*m*) fingers. This of course limits my ability to play fast *i m i m* passages like a flamenco or classical player but these are generally single line phrases that I would prefer to play with a pick. I can easily use my pick for these

faster linear ideas and swap back to finger style for a more open texture and broken chords. Many players have great success with the hybrid picking method where you hold the pick with thumb and index finger and use your other right hand fingers (including your “pinky”) to achieve a wider contrapuntal style. There are two main problems with this technique for me, the first is that it uses your two strongest right hand elements (thumb and index finger) to only do one job (the plectrum) leaving your weakest fingers to do the rest, this can create an unbalanced approach. The second problem is having to use your smallest right hand finger to pluck the strings, the pinky on most right hands (including mine) is much shorter than the other fingers and the positional adjustment required to enable the use of that finger puts the hand in a cramped, awkward position, completely at odds with my traditional classical right hand training.

Recordings: Other Instruments

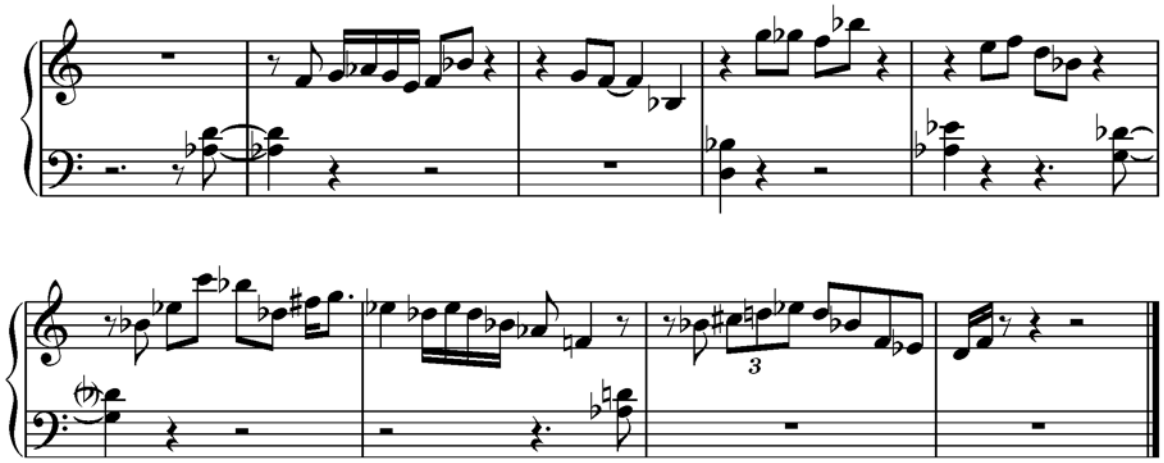
Students of music who play the guitar must become accustomed to sourcing their musical ideas from outside the relatively small and specialised guitar repertoire. In the history of western classical music, the guitar doesn’t feature in any of the major advances in the music. It’s possible to play some transcriptions of J.S. Bach but the major figures throughout history wrote for orchestra, chamber ensembles (very rarely including the guitar) or the piano. It is slightly less so in jazz but still the main innovators moving the music forward were (up until recent times) rarely guitar players. It is therefore necessary to look for useful concepts from non-guitarists that apply to the playing of jazz in a more general way, with the piano being the

instrument that mostly fulfils the chordal/melodic role. The post Hancock/Evans pianists have many interesting harmonic concepts and are an excellent source for ideas, however they are often too immersed in the virtuosic piano tradition for textural concepts to be usefully applied to the more limited range of the guitar. I found the earlier bop and hard bop pianists such as Bud Powell, Hampton Hawes, Sonny Clark, Red Garland and particularly Wynton Kelly to be textural "role models". Most of these players focused on a hard-swinging melodic line with chords as "answers" to their lines, punctuating the phrases.

The playing of Wynton Kelly was especially relevant to this study. I was drawn to the classic Blue Note, Prestige and Riverside recordings of the mid 1950s through to the mid to late 1960s, and noted the presence of Kelly as a first-call [3] rhythm section player. A closer inspection of Kelly's piano playing reveals a lean, muscular, highly rhythmic style, playing strong melodic phrases with a sparse comping style, texturally very achievable on the guitar. As a relevant example, figure 2 is the first eight bars of Kelly's solo from 'Freddie Freeloader' by Miles Davis from the album *Kind of Blue* (1959).

[3] Due to the freelance nature of the jazz industry, ensembles with fixed personnel are rare. Most commonly, ensembles are assembled for specific playing or recording engagements. "First-call" is an indication of a player's high status on the list of possible musicians considered for a job.

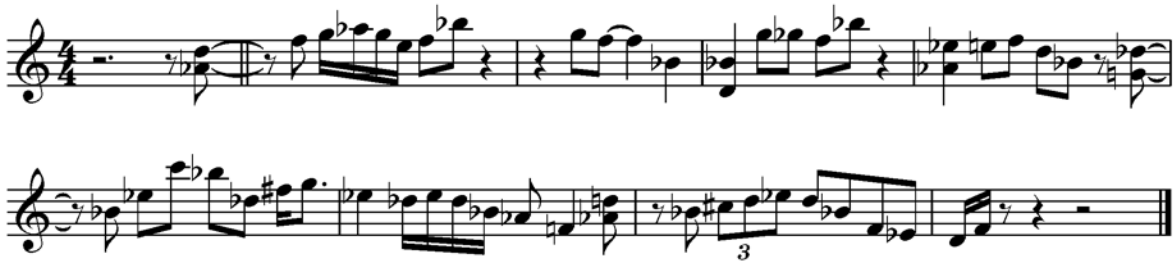
Fig. 2



This excerpt is the very start of Kelly's solo and the textural concept is evident; the melodic line leads the way with the left hand punctuating simple guide-tone based chords.

Figure 3 is a reduction of the piano part to a single stave for guitar, there is necessary re-arrangement of the register in places, making the comping and melodic line more inter-twined but more manageable on the fret-board.

Fig. 3



When playing this passage (guitar notation, sounding an octave lower) based around the sixth fret we find the chords voiced in a virtually identical way to the most common guitar voicings for B flat 7, B flat, B flat sus (Fm7) and E flat 7 and most importantly with the function of the chord (mainly thirds and sevenths) falling on the third and fourth strings. The separation of the six strings into three general functional groups; the top two strings (highest sounding) E and B for melodies, the middle two strings, G and D for voice leading, guide tones and harmonic function and the lower pair of strings for bass notes. Of course, this is an over-simplification of the guitar fretboard and musical ideas often do not fit neatly into this format, but it is very useful as a basic starting point to approach melodic/harmonic integration. Utilising this lean textural concept is important for me whilst improvising, it is possible to play solo guitar in a fuller, more dense style, as shown by Greene, Taylor and Breau, but this style of complex arranging involves too many pre-conceived ideas for this to be a viable improvising tool. Having continuous accompaniment such as walking bass or complex moving harmony compromises my ability to improvise and ties up much of my thinking into maintaining basic elements.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Many of the concepts and techniques examined in this study are best expressed through performance and are presented in this work as videos of solo performances. There are however, a core group of concepts that I have discussed as being vital to successful solo jazz guitar improvising. This study attempts to strike a balance between which elements are best played and which are best discussed. The two are enmeshed throughout this study.

The first section of this study places my playing style in the context of improvised jazz guitar and jazz performance in general. I have provided some background and examples of how I formulated the concepts addressed in this study.

The literature review covers relevant works in the field but also highlights the lack of specific guitar works. Most teaching methods tend to be chordal *or* melodic, rather than address the integration of the two. Recordings by other artists also form an important part of the literature review as many of the most relevant improvisers are currently producing work only available on recordings.

The first recital was a key component of this work, it established the core principles on which I based my ideas and provided material that I expanded and sought to improve on throughout the course of this study. The first recital also helped to define many of my main performance parameters. After critical listening to the performance

I selected passages that I felt best demonstrated my core ideas and then using transcription and detailed analysis of the transcriptions I was able to ascertain whether or not they are clear representations of my concepts. This process also allowed me to objectively listen to the overall performance and identify weaker concepts or ideas that have limited use in the solo format.

The first recital set the parameters for subsequent performances. I played the one instrument throughout each performance, plugged directly into an amplifier with no electronic effects. The nature of the semi-acoustic archtop guitar is best exemplified this way, as the listener is able to hear a blend of the acoustic and electric sounds of the instrument. This is important for me as the acoustic qualities help with variation in articulation and give the guitar it's rhythmic, percussive attack, whereas the amplified sound boosts the overall volume and presence of the guitar in the room, especially filling out the lower register.

I have not sought to challenge any accepted notions of what constitutes "improvising", the improvised sections of my recitals were based on standard forms using a jazz language developed over many years as a performer playing mainstream, bebop, post-bop and modern styles.

The material chosen for recitals was based on how best to demonstrate my concept; there were standard 32 bar forms played in a 4/4 swing style and straight Brazilian influenced feels. As well as the various 4/4 rhythms there were 3/4 pieces. The odd-

meter time signatures of 5/4 and 7/4 also played an integral part in the overall rhythmic concept of this study.

Subsequent recitals were treated in much the same way, although I aimed for more specific outcomes in the later recitals, based on the analysis of the first recital. There was a focus in later recitals on improving some of the areas identified as being problematic. These weaker areas were addressed as comprehensively as possible within the parameters of the study.

Technical analysis of the specific guitar techniques I have developed was undertaken; these techniques are vital to some of the textural, polyphonic and self-accompaniment aspects of my playing.

Chapter 3: Key Improvising Concepts in Solo Performance

Transcription and analysis were undertaken for a series of solo recitals to investigate the most relevant features of these solo performances. The importance of several key fundamentals that combine both harmonic and melodic roles was examined. Recital one took place on the 24th of February, 2015 and was significant in the context of this study as it brought into clear focus the main objectives for this work. Analysis of the first recital led me to identify four key concepts,

1. Melodic Chords/Harmonic Melodies
2. Integration of Melodic and Chordal Playing (self-accompaniment and phrasing concepts)
3. Rhythmic Drive/Time Feel/Forward Motion
4. Deep Understanding of the Material

Melodic Chords/Harmonic Melodies

This is an important component of my integrated guitar concept. When pianists play, melody and accompaniment are often neatly separated, with the left hand playing accompaniment and the right hand playing melodies. This is not possible on the guitar, so melody and accompaniment must be more integrated. Because there is not a clear distinction between melody and accompaniment on the guitar, all melodic ideas must have a high level of explicit harmonic content, and all chordal ideas must be melodically strong.

There are many examples of melodic, yet harmonically explicit ideas in the playing of saxophonists Sonny Rollins, Sonny Stitt and Charlie Parker. The following examples show each player's application of the identical harmonic idea. The phrase occurs in bar 9 of a standard blues form (the *ii*-*V*). Each phrase has been transposed into C major for the purpose of comparison. The concept is based around the root of the D minor chord descending to the major seventh (C sharp) and again to the minor seventh (C natural) then one more semi-tone to the B natural (the third of the G7 chord)

Fig. 4

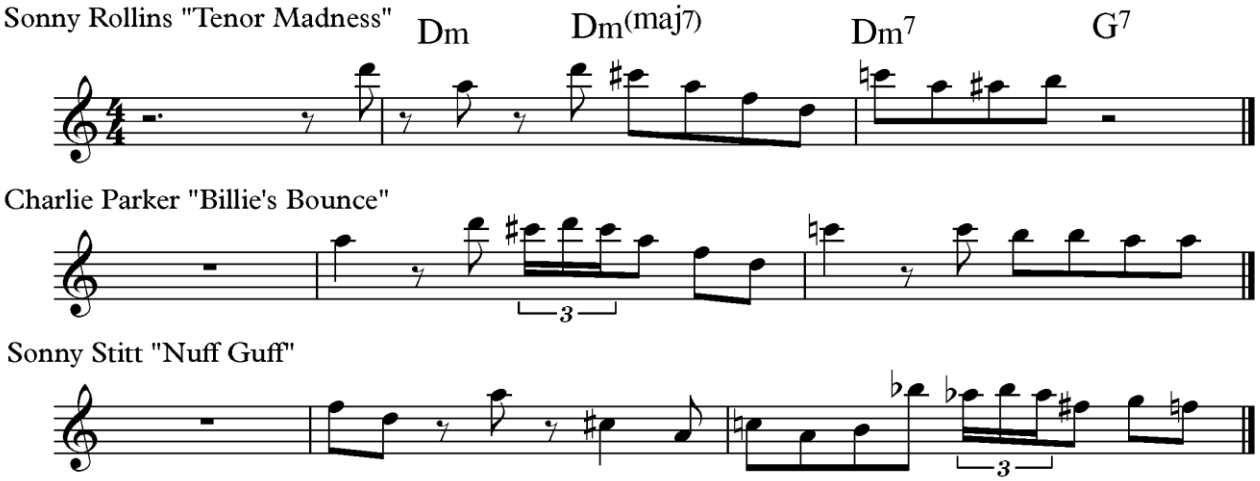


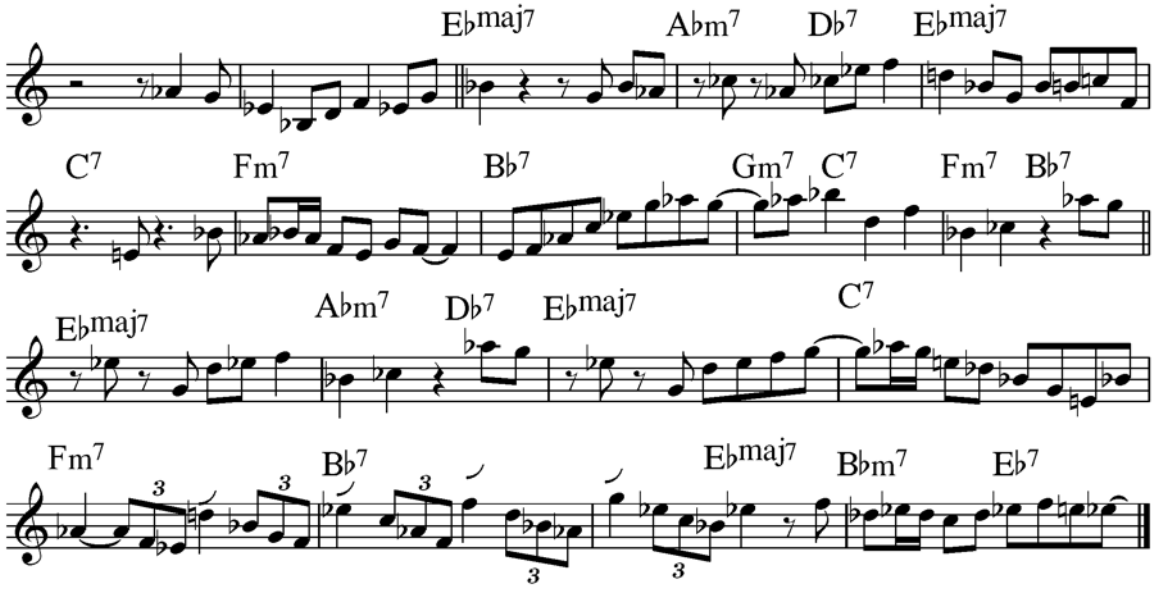
Figure 4 demonstrates how these players are able to present precise functional harmonic information in melodic and rhythmically interesting ways.

When looking for examples of harmonically explicit melodies from my first recital, phrases were transcribed from my arrangement of the Charlie Parker composition ‘Dewey Square’. Chordal accompaniment was specifically avoided for the melody, and the single-line only melodic ideas were continued for the first 60 bars of the solo, slowly introducing accompaniment at the end of the second improvised chorus. By using this concept, I found my melodies were very focused on the harmony, often based on clear arpeggios or guide-tone based phrases.

Figure 5 with audio example 1 is from the beginning of the first improvised chorus, leading to the A flat major bridge section.

Audio Ex 1

Fig. 5



The harmonic intentions are arguably very clear in this excerpt with strong guide-tones on or around the first beat of the bar and mostly arpeggiated chordal ideas. Even though I am trying to create an interesting melodic contour and develop themes, there is a solid harmonic framework upon which my ideas are built.

An important concept to introduce at this point is based on Hal Galper's work in his book "Forward Motion: From Bach to Bebop: A Corrective Approach to Jazz Phrasing" (Galper, 2003). Galper's concept is essentially rhythmic but when combined with strong, clear harmonic ideas it becomes a multi-faceted base upon which to build phrasing with clear intent and direction. Galper states; "(beat) one of the bar is not the first beat of the bar, it is the last beat of the bar, it is the beat to which melodic ideas are played toward and at which they end." (Galper, 2003: 17)

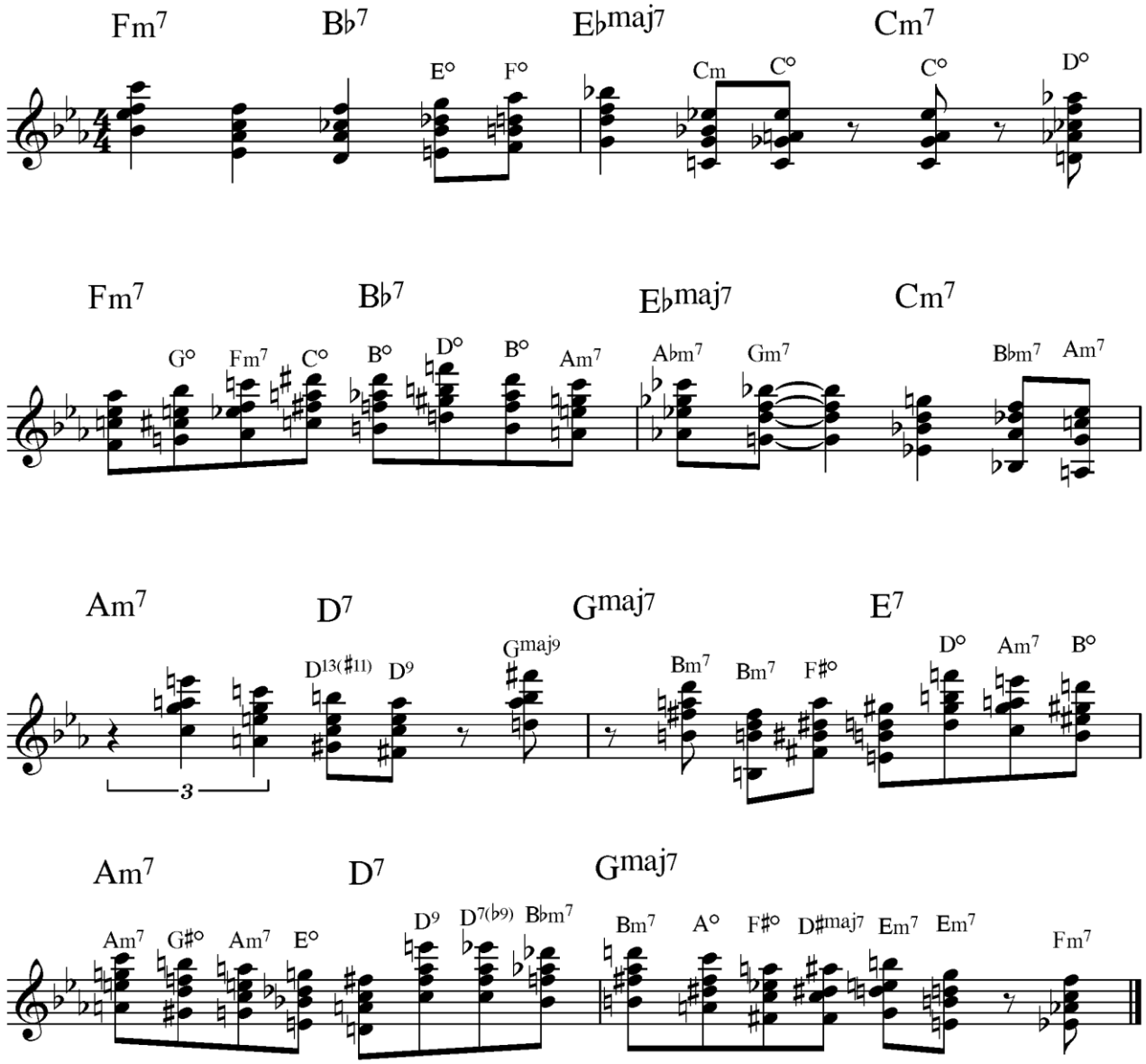
In this transcribed example, I use beat one as a phrasing and harmonic destination in bars three, five, ten, twelve, fifteen, seventeen and eighteen. As well as beat one I would also include anticipations as destinations, these anticipations occur mostly on the "and" of beat four and help to keep the rhythmic motion moving forward. Examples of anticipated destinations in this example are bars nine, eleven, thirteen, fourteen and the final bar leading into the A flat chord in the bridge. This "harmonic melody" idea is nothing new, nor is it exclusive to this study or the guitar, it is a fundamental principle of all harmonically based improvisation.

Steve Kahn in his work "Contemporary Chord Khancepts" states "NEVER view the left-hand aspect as "just a bunch of chords". The concept is to ALWAYS hear the top note of any chord as having melodic content" (Khan, 1996: 5). Barry Galbraith also refers to melodic chordal playing in "Guitar Comping" (Galbraith, 1986), he prefaces his accompaniment for the composition 'Body and Soul' (renamed 'Sole') with the statement; "The following piece is more melodic than any of the previous comps and would almost form a duet with the soloist" (Galbraith, 1986: 28). As this piece is the final, most advanced exercise in the book, to me he is inferring that this style of melodic, interactive accompaniment is the goal of his chordal style.

Figure 6 is a transcription of Wes Montgomery from the 1960 recording *The Incredible Jazz Guitar of Wes Montgomery*. The song is 'Gone with the Wind' (Wrubel, 1937) and in this example Montgomery uses his highly developed chordal

style to build the overall dynamic of his solo. The first 32 bar form of his solo is all single line melody, the second and third choruses are octave lines and the fourth and fifth choruses are block chords. Montgomery introduces each new concept directly at the top of the form, indicating his intention to build the solo in a methodical way. The top line of his chordal improvising has a strong melodic contour and as Steve Kahn states is never “just a bunch of chords” (Khan, 1996: 5)

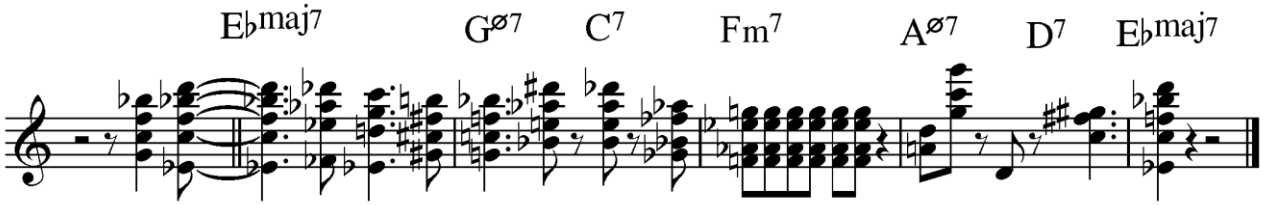
Fig. 6



I have used the following excerpts to demonstrate my own melodic chordal playing in two different tempos. Audio example 2 with figure 7 is from ‘Fried Bananas’, a medium to up-tempo swing feel and ‘Never Let Me Go’ a more flowing, straight quaver ballad feel. The technical harmonic elements are quite simple, common tone chord substitution, inversion and tri-tone substitution.

Audio Ex. 2

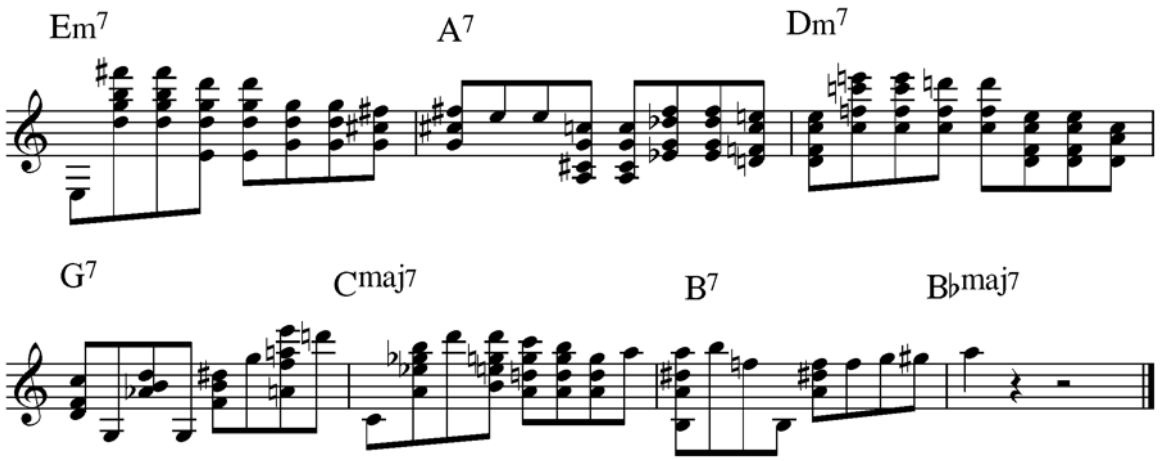
Figure 7



Audio example 3 with figure 8 is an excerpt from ‘Never Let Me Go’, this demonstrates a melodic chordal approach but is also an example of forward motion. Beat one of each bar is the destination point of the material from the previous bar, especially bars one, three, five and seven of this excerpt.

Audio Ex 3

Fig. 8



Integration of Melodic and Chordal Playing: Self-Accompaniment and Phrasing Concepts

The following examples are from two guitar trio recordings, both players having strong self-accompaniment concepts.

Figure 9 is a transcription of the composition ‘Chitlins con Carne’ from Kenny Burrell’s 1960 recording *Midnight Blue*. Burrell was an active guitarist throughout the 1960s and his jazz playing was infused with a strong blues-based character. Again, we see the common thread throughout this study of there being no piano or other chordal instrument present on this recording so Burrell simultaneously fulfils the melodic and chordal role using a riff based call-and-response pattern.

Fig. 9

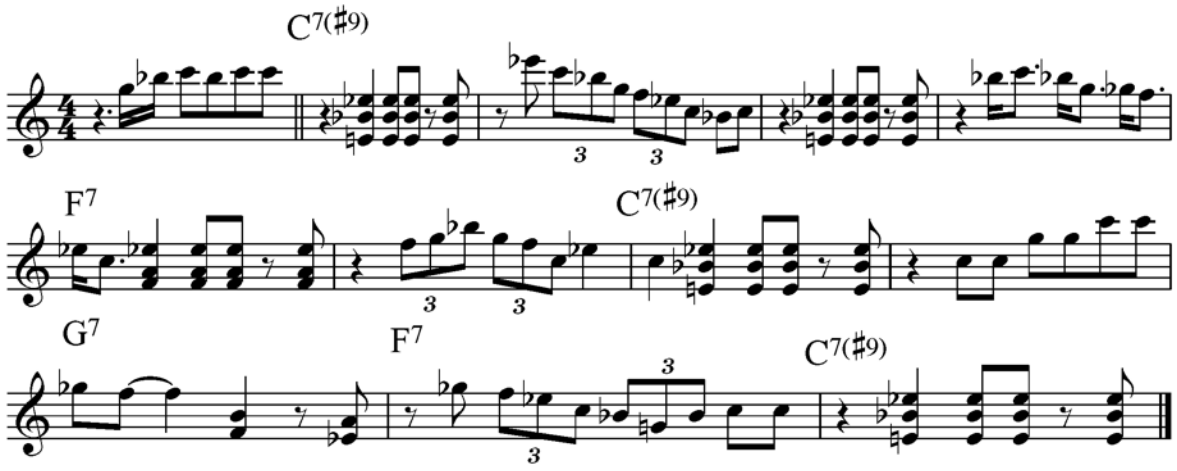
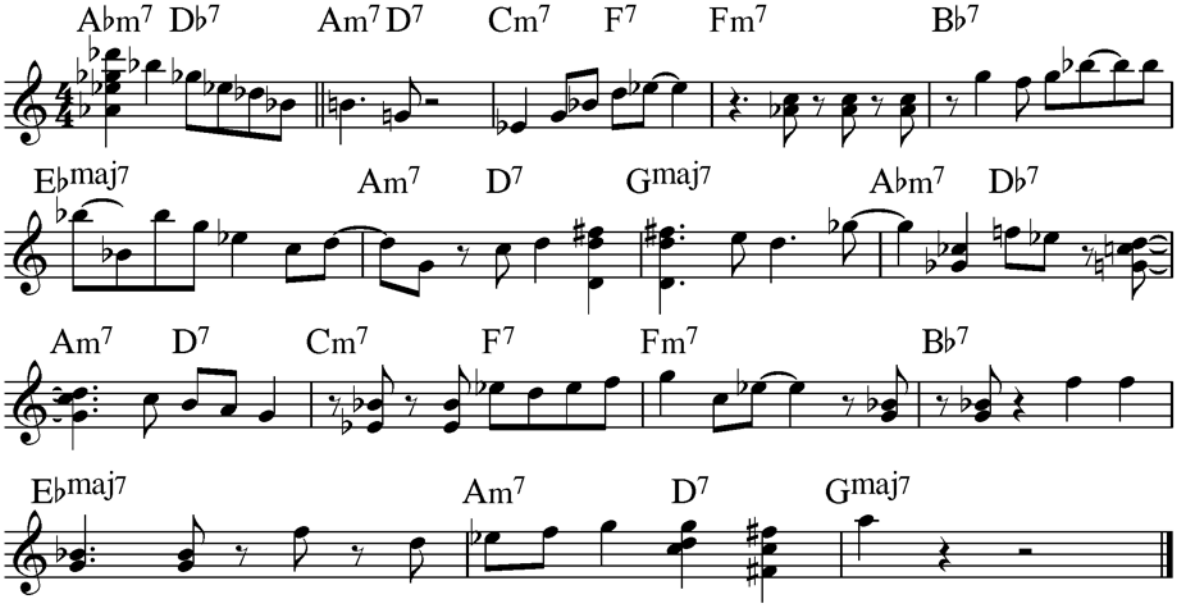


Fig. 10 is an example of clear harmonic intent from American guitarist Kurt Rosenwinkel. The excerpt is from the John Coltrane composition ‘Lazy Bird’ from Rosenwinkel’s 1996 recording *East Coast Love Affair*. This excerpt demonstrates

Rosenwinkel's integrated melodic/harmonic concept in an improvising context. His harmony is very clearly stated, whether he is playing a chordal texture, as in bar 4 (3rd and 5th of the chord), or melodic statements built from arpeggios, as in bars 3 and 6. This type of playing points to the need for a very clear connection between chords and melodies. Rosenwinkel is free to choose a melodic or chordal statement at any point in his improvising, this can only be achieved through the thorough learning of the fretboard in an integrated way.

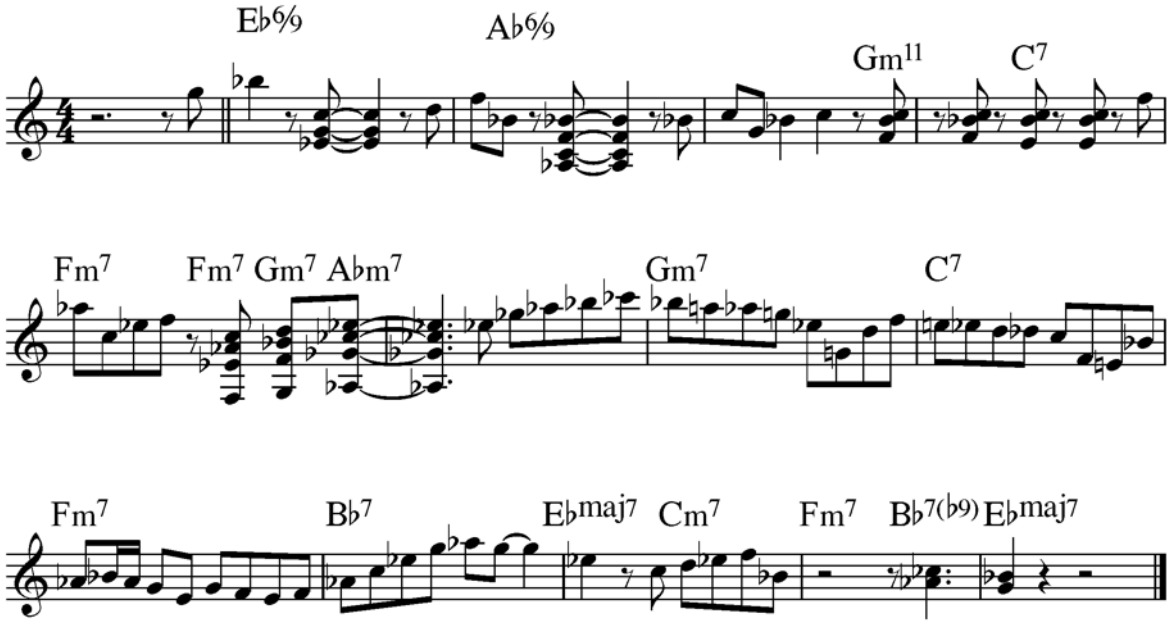
Fig. 10



Audio example 4 (figure 11) demonstrates my own interpretation of this concept in 'Fried Bananas'. It has similarities to Rosenwinkel's approach in that the chords are punctuating the phrasing, not in a strict "call and response" way, (like the Burrell example) but in a freer demonstration of "self-accompaniment", where I vary the length of the melodic phrase and use chords to answer these phrases.

Audio Ex 4

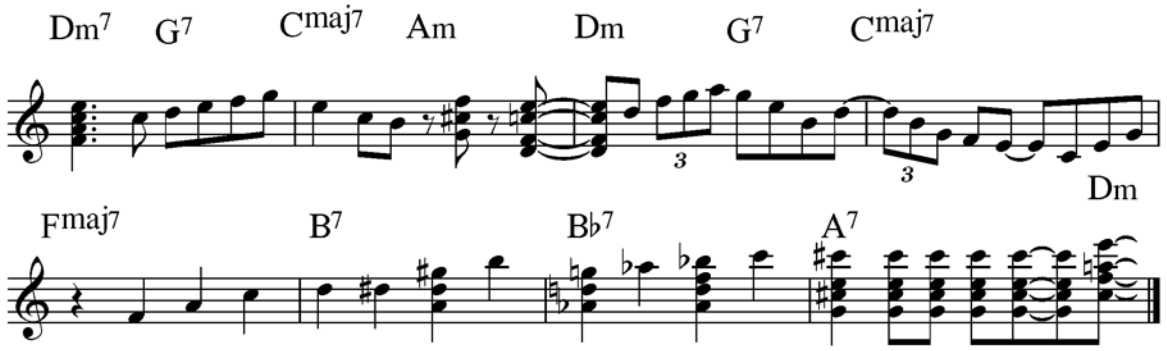
Fig. 11



Audio example 5 (figure 12) demonstrates a more integrated approach; this short excerpt uses both harmonic melody and melodic harmony to integrate accompaniment and melody. Also of note is the use of contrary motion, playing an ascending melodic line through the descending harmonic progression in bars five, six, seven and eight.

Audio Ex 5

Fig. 12



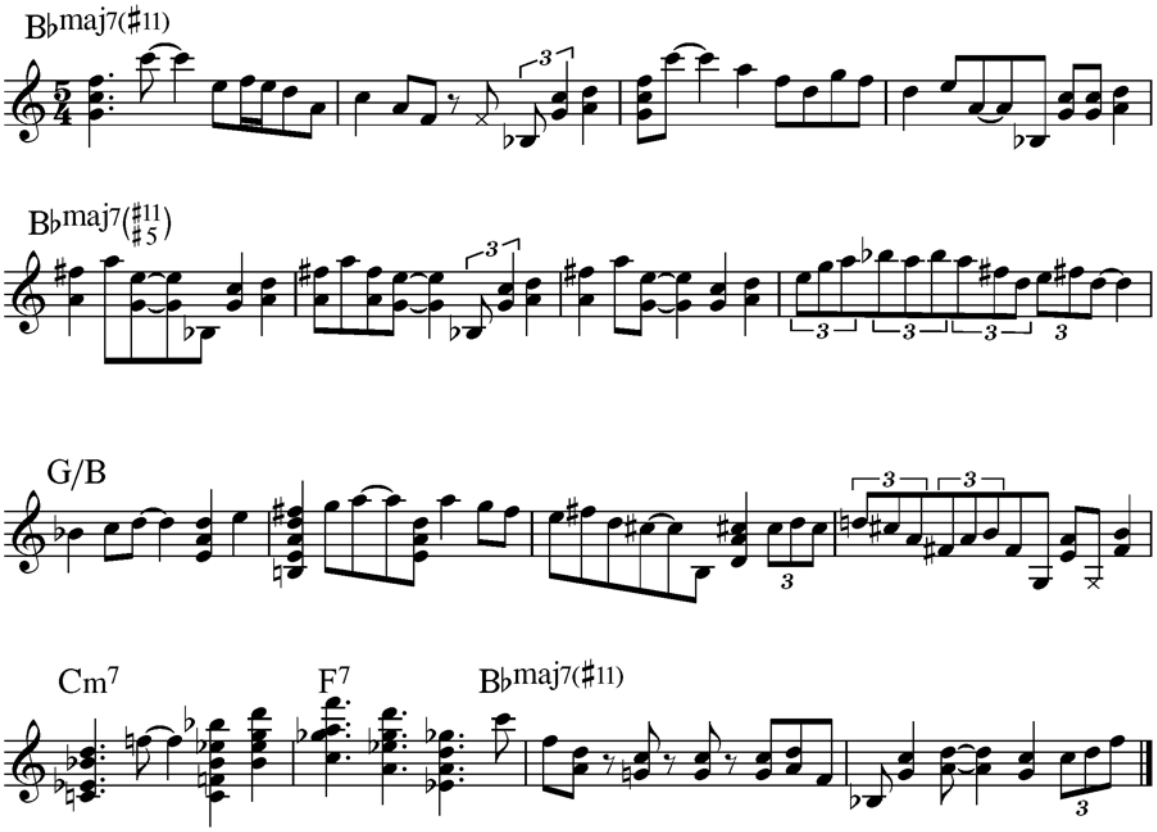
I have observed a common arrangement device in many styles of solo guitar performance, often employed throughout classical guitar pieces. For the purposes of this study, I have termed this concept “ghost” accompaniment. This is when an accompaniment figure is stated clearly at the beginning of the composition to set up the overall feel and mood and then when the melody begins the accompaniment is reduced to small fragments, enough to remind the listener of the underlying accompaniment without the technical problems of having separate accompaniment and melodic parts.

Guitarist Mimi Fox describes something similar when talking of her solo guitar arrangement of Wes Montgomery’s ‘Four on Six’. Fox states, “The bass line runs throughout the original, but I just play it at the beginning and hope that people will feel it continuing underneath as a layer while I'm playing the changes over it, even though I don't actually return to it.” (Fox, 2013)

Audio example 6 (figure 13) is taken from the first improvised chorus of my composition ‘Domestic Arts’. This composition makes much use of this “ghost accompaniment” concept, the triplet accompaniment figure is heard throughout the solo and influences many of the rhythmic decisions I make in the improvising, to the point of becoming *too* repetitious. This problem I address later in the Rhythmic Variety section of Chapter 4.

Audio Ex 6

Fig 13



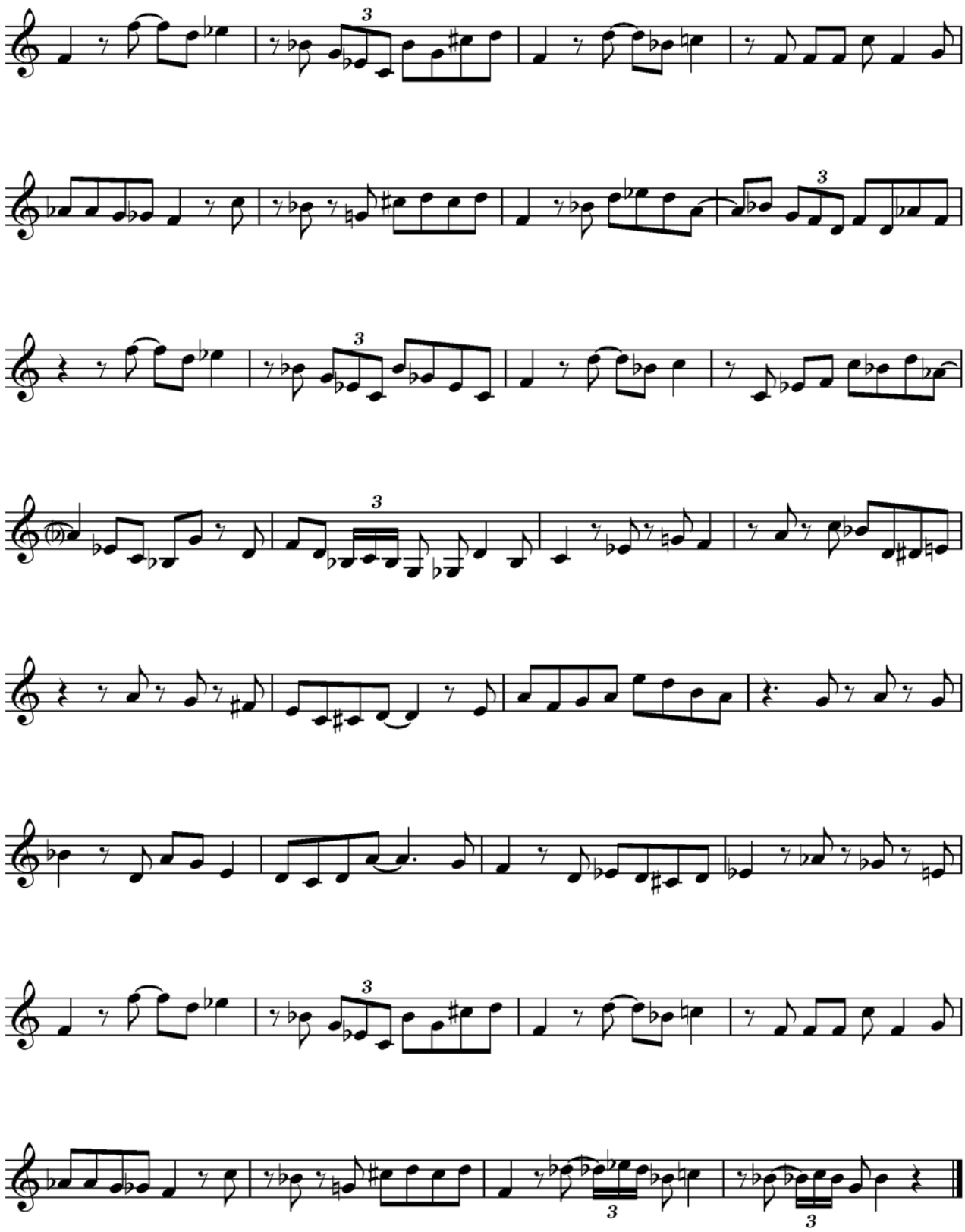
Rhythmic Drive and Clarity, Forward Motion and Time Feel

Every serious jazz student spends time transcribing the solos of master improvisers and there are many important lessons to be learnt relating to all aspects of playing. One deceptively simple concept that is consistent throughout all great harmonically informed improvisers is the idea of playing phrases that employ the use of step-wise motion onto beats one or three of the bar. This is most commonly semitone movement falling onto the strong harmonic beats (beats one and three are most often when the chord changes occur).

This serves two main purposes; it is the smoothest voice leading between moving harmonic guide tones and it is also commonly played on most instruments as legato or a slur; on the guitar legato could be a hammer on, pull off or slide. This is commonly referred to as jazz articulation and in simple terms it means not picking on beat one or three, this takes the rhythmic emphasis away from the downbeat and onto the upbeat; Dizzy Gillespie is quoted in Galper's book as stating, "The more upbeats you have in the music, the more it swings." (Galper: 2003, 14)

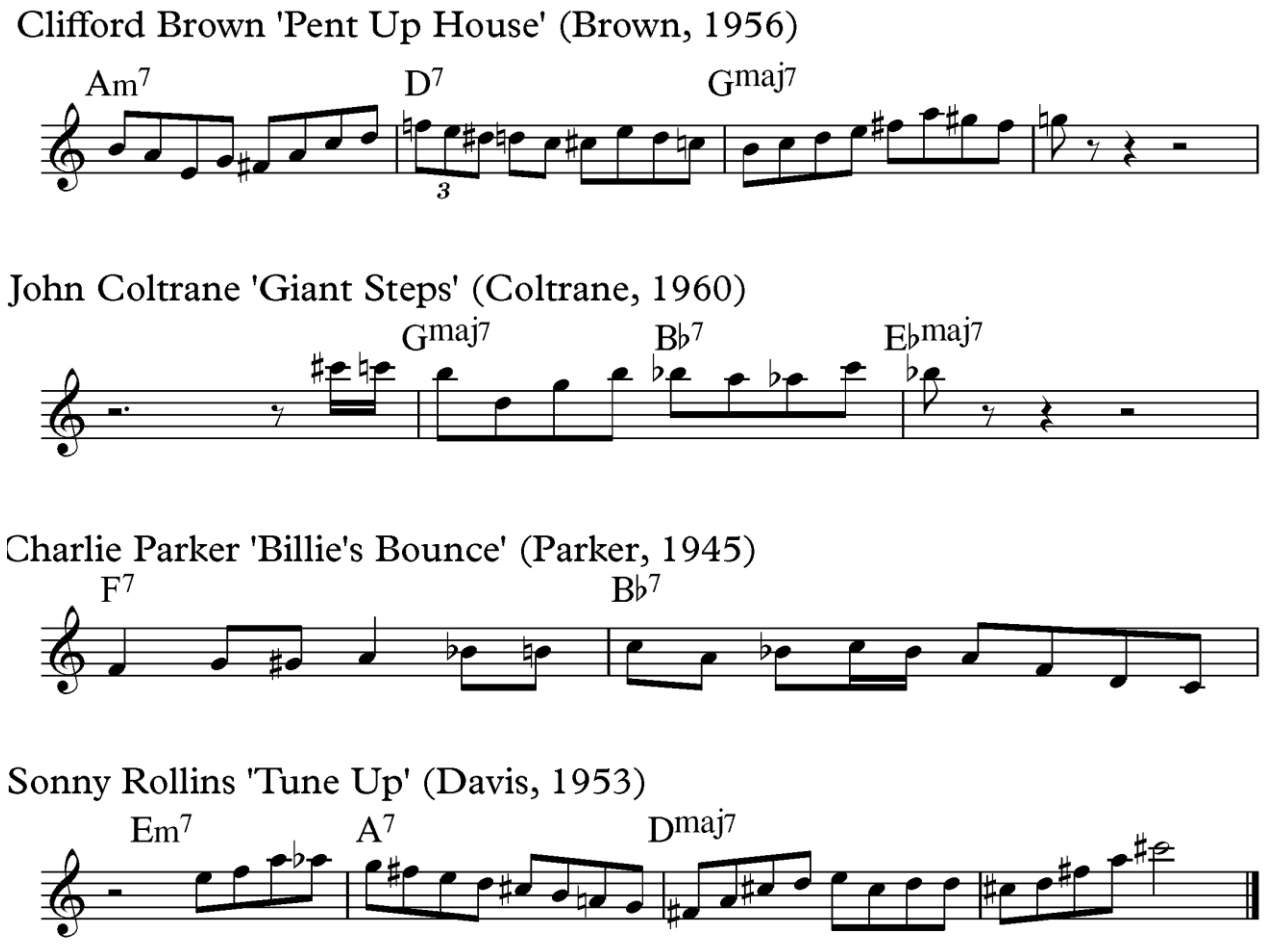
Figure 14 is the Parker/Gillespie composition 'Moose the Mooche', in this example we can see the importance Gillespie places on the upbeat. Also note the semitone resolutions onto beats one and three, starting at bar six and continuing at various points elsewhere throughout the melody.

Fig. 14



The following examples are clear demonstrations of semi-tone resolutions onto beats 1 or 3.

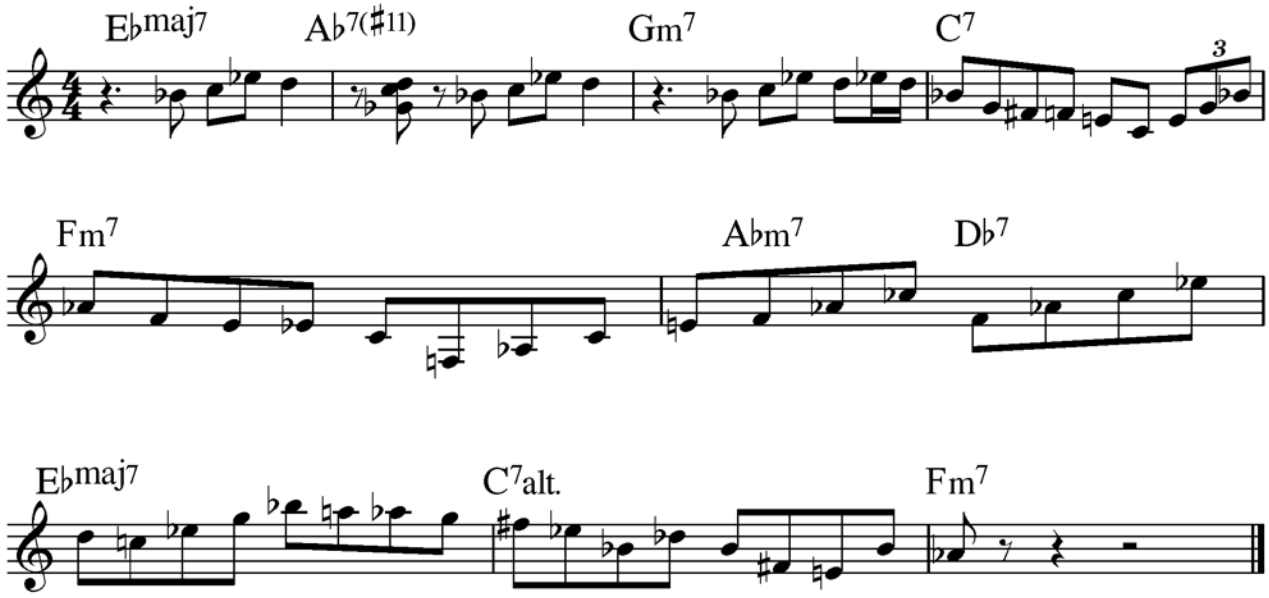
Fig. 15



Audio example 7 (figure 16) is a transcribed passage from ‘Fried Bananas’ from recital one. In this example, there are many instances of stepwise (tone or semi-tone) resolution onto the beats. The legato resolutions onto beat one of bars five, seven, eight and nine give the rhythmically simple quaver line in bars four, five, six, seven and eight some rhythmic “life” by putting the emphasis onto the offbeat.

Audio Ex 7

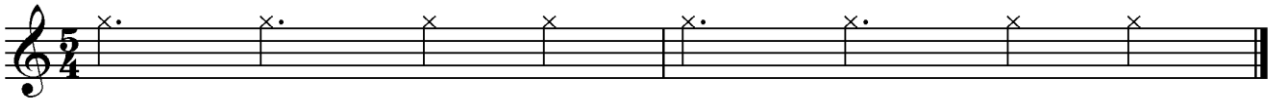
Fig. 16



As well as semitones falling onto beats one and three there are also examples of semitones falling onto beats two and four (as in bars one, two, three and four). This is not vital to the harmonic clarity but does keep the rhythmic emphasis on the offbeat, maintaining the swing feel.

Modern improvisers are expected to be able to improvise in odd or changing meters as much as they are expected to be able to improvise over dense harmonic progressions. The most common form of rhythmic organisation is to use a clave, this is a repetitive pattern that gives the odd meter a solid feel and eliminates the need to count every beat, especially useful for faster tempos. As with many jazz concepts odd-meter playing is not purely a rhythmic device, we need to also consider harmony. A common issue is when a composition has two chords in a bar with five or seven

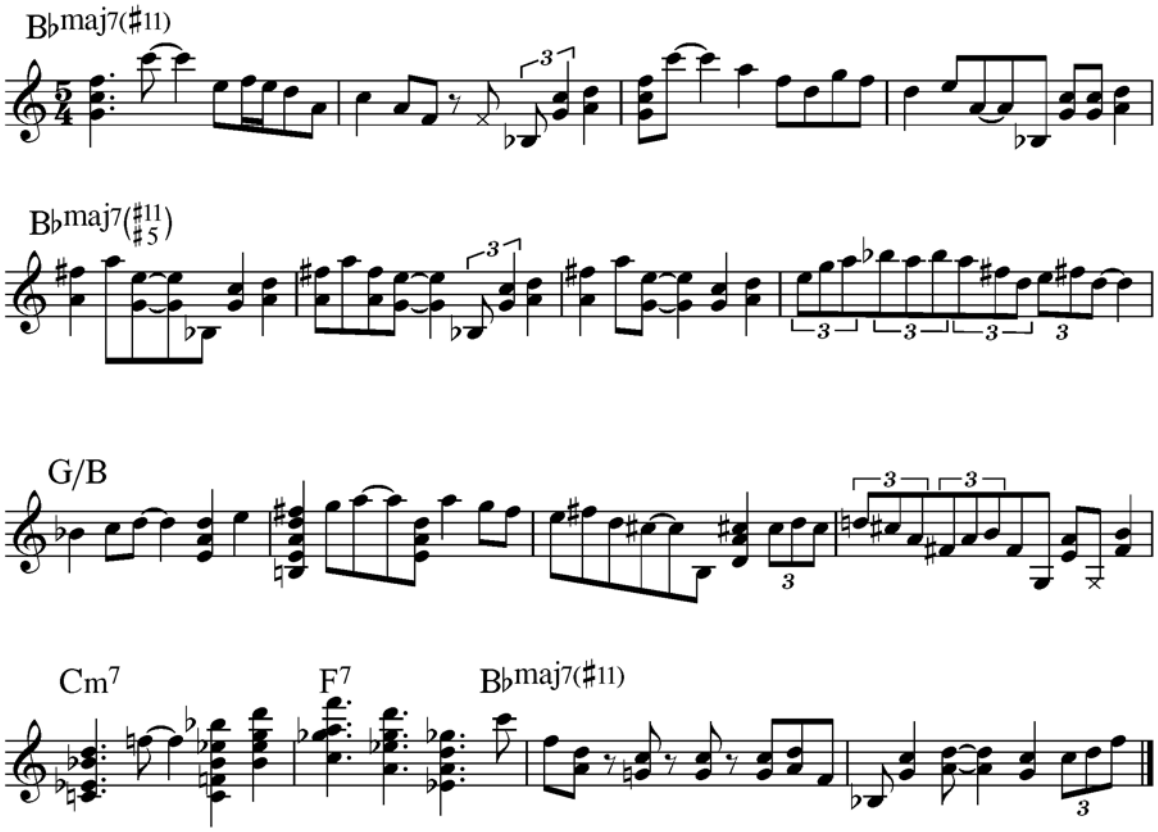
beats, you cannot divide the chords evenly, so the use of a clave is a solution. The most common 5/4 clave in jazz is to break the five beats into two bars, one bar of 3/4, followed by a bar of 2/4, both bars are then divided in half resulting in two dotted crotchets followed by two crotchets.



Audio example 8 with figure 17 is taken from my composition ‘Domestic Arts’, the composition is based around this clave, as is the improvisation that follows.

Audio Ex 8.

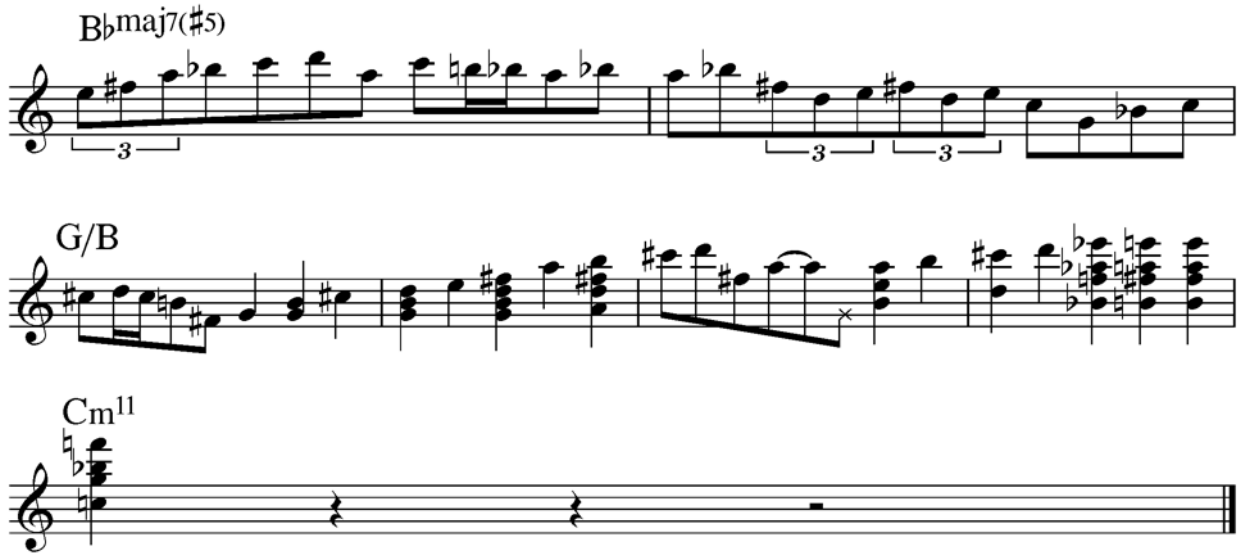
Fig. 17



The use of clave based rhythmic organisation is prevalent throughout this composition, to the point of becoming repetitive and rhythmically rigid, it was difficult to find instances of a freer more natural approach to phrasing in 5/4. Audio example 9 (figure 18) shows an example of a phrase that stretches over the barline and does not rely on the clave for rhythmic organisation.

Audio Ex 9

Fig. 18



Odd-meter improvising is an important concept throughout this study, as it provides a rhythmic option to facilitate further variety. The clave concept is an area of constant re-evaluation. My aim is to strive for rhythmic interest and variety but also to ensure the time feel and odd meter are solid.

Deep Understanding of the Material

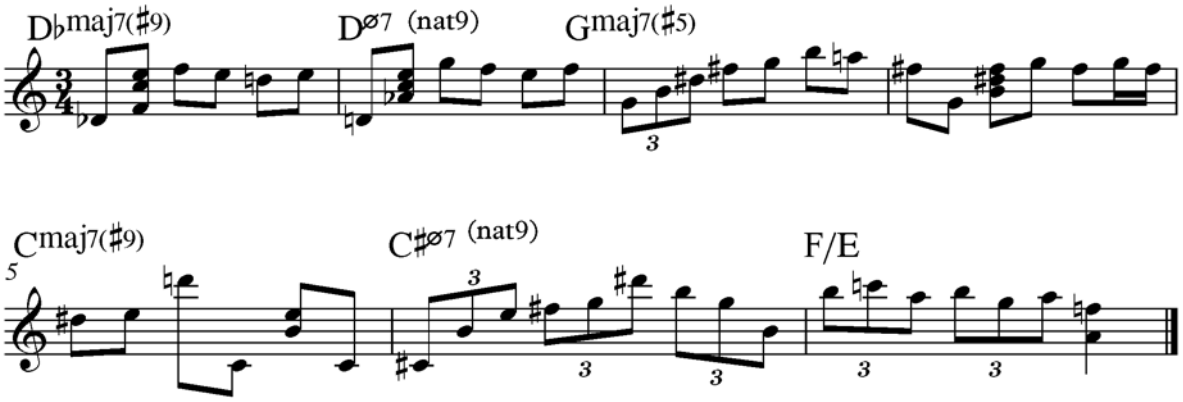
Deep understanding of the form and harmony is required to be able to improvise in a clear and structured way at the highest level. This enables the soloist to follow and develop improvised ideas using the composition as a framework upon which to build. The elements of the composition must be internalised and not restrict the soloist. The soloist must be able to acknowledge all the parts (melody/harmonic progression/accompanying figures) at any time regardless of whether or not they are being explicitly stated.

I have chosen my original composition ‘Watermark’ to demonstrate how compositional ideas are developed through the complex harmony.

The compositional elements identified in audio excerpt 10 (figure 19) are the melodic shape in the first two bars (further developed in bars three and four) and the semitone followed by an upward leap motif in bars five and six. This shows that as the improvisation is developing, I am thinking of not only the differences between the changing chords but also the similarities and where I can develop a motif when the chord changes. This requires deep understanding of the harmonic movement. If I was required to think about what chord came next or some sort of basic technical element it would impact on the flow of my ideas.

Audio Ex 10

Fig. 19



Chapter 4: Creating Variety in Improvised Solo Guitar Performance

In my analysis of Recital one there were four main concepts I identified as unifying factors for a successful performance in a solo improvised guitar setting.

1. Melodic Chords/Harmonic Melodies
2. Integration of Melodic and Chordal Playing (self-accompaniment and phrasing concepts)
3. Rhythmic Drive/Time Feel/Forward Motion
4. Deep Understanding of the Material

These are all observable elements that can be demonstrated using transcriptions and/or sound samples. There is however, an element that I see as a potential problem or weakness in programming a successful solo recital, and that is the concept of variety.

The production involved for this recital was minimal, I played the one instrument for the entire performance, plugged directly into an amplifier to enhance the volume, but not so amplified as to mask the acoustic properties of the archtop guitar. This production was duplicated for all subsequent recitals observed in this study. This may seem restrictive as there are a range of electronic effects available for guitar that allow for a variety of sonic manipulations and tone colours, there is also the potential to use different guitars to exploit the particular tonal characteristics of an individual

instrument. Whilst these are valid solutions, they fall outside the scope of this study and I intend to address the issue of variety using three main concepts,

1. Rhythmic Variety.
2. Variety of Repertoire.
3. Variety of articulation and tonal variation.

My preparation for the first recital involved my regular process, which involves familiarizing myself with the melodic and harmonic content of the compositions to give me a sound base upon which to improvise. After critical analysis, my preparation for subsequent recitals became more specific, I was able to single out concepts that I felt required development and focus on these areas in my practice and preparation.

Rhythmic Variety

There are many ways to create rhythmic variety in jazz performance, I chose three very specific topics upon which to focus my practice.

1. Use of rubato and free-time passages.
2. Widening the range of tempos used.
3. Improvising using less restricted odd-meter rhythmic language.

When comparing my first recital with conceptually similar solo guitar recordings (standard repertoire with both arranged and improvised sections) such as Joe Pass

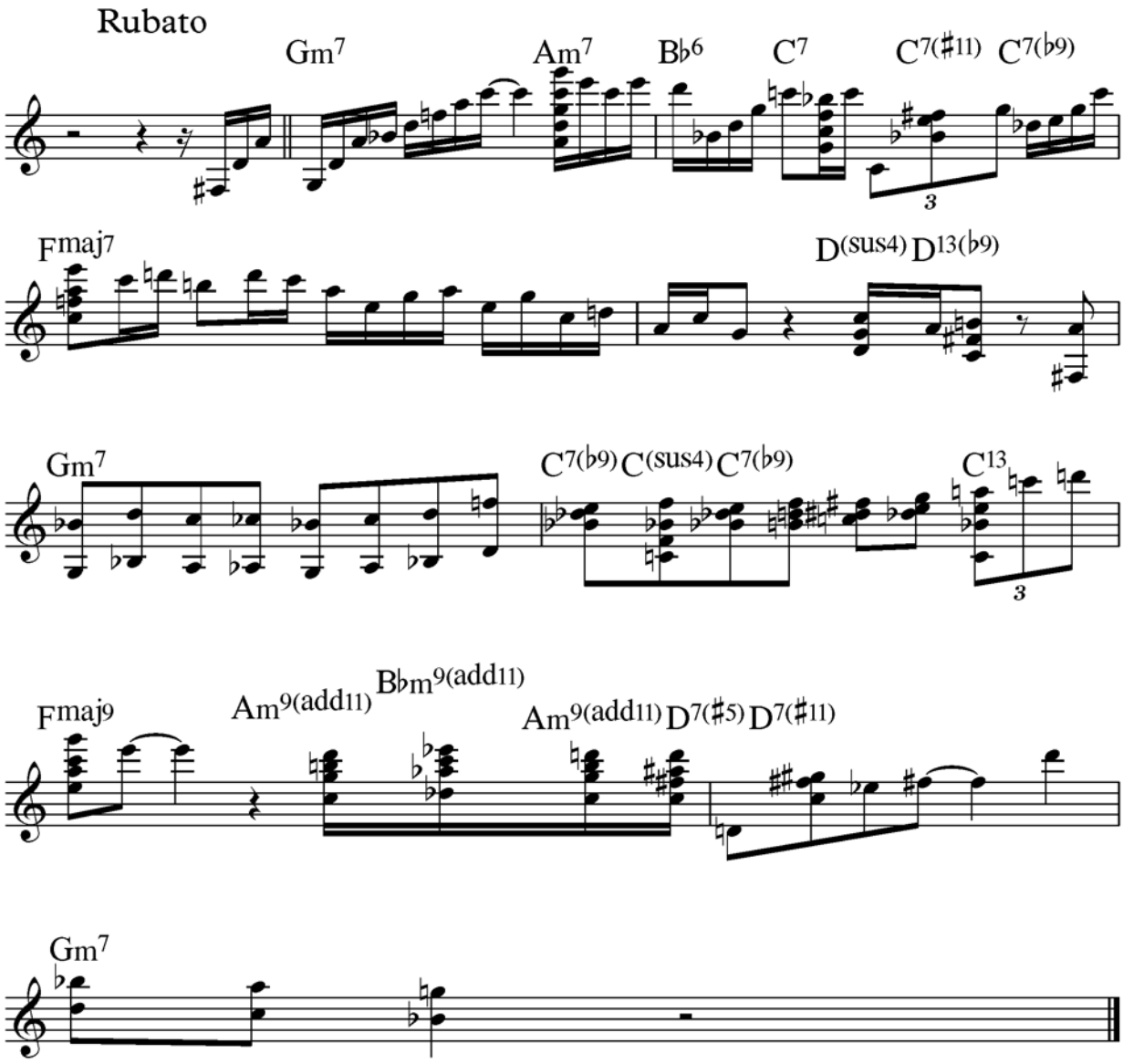
Virtuoso or Peter Bernstein's *Solo Guitar* their prevalent use of long rubato sections, often serving as introductions, seemed to me to be an important arranging tool.

With this as a template I started the second piece, Vernon Duke's 'Autumn in New York' without a clear pulse and found it to be a useful way of exploring both the harmony and the melody of the work in a freer, more open manner. I found I was able to approach the melody in a very legato "singing" style, using subtle vibrato to get the longest note length possible from the guitar and pausing on what I consider to be important and interesting parts of the song. In the introductory section of the piece I used an out of time F minor vamp to set up call and response phrases between chords and melody. The extra space afforded by playing this out of time allowed for maximum expression of my ideas, not having to neatly fit them into a restrictive pulse. As well as allowing for expressive melodic playing rubato allows for more exploratory harmony, often taking the "long way around" to get from one chord to the next. I also found it easier to vary my arrangement when repeating passages, the arrangement felt freer and less locked in to particular voicing ideas. My pre-conceived arrangement was to play the melody out of time and then set up a steady pulse for the improvising, I found when the improvisation began it seemed natural and musical to continue with the rubato. The challenge being to maintain contact with the general harmonic scheme and phrase structure of the original song.

The example in audio excerpt 11 with figure 20 is a demonstration of how the improvisation stays grounded in the form of the song using the harmony to dictate the movement rather than the pulse.

Audio Ex 11

Fig. 20



An interesting unplanned addition to the performance of this piece was the inclusion of the short F minor vamp repeated at the end but played with a slow pulse, this was

the only clear pulse based section of the performance. This type of spontaneous arrangement decision highlights the benefit of not having a pre-conceived arrangement, the advantages in being able to respond to the overall flow and dynamic of each piece in real time far outweighs (for me) the possible risk of the piece breaking down due to lack of structure.

The other composition to which I introduced rubato was the Antonio Carlos Jobim piece ‘Inutil Paisagem’. I used rubato as an arrangement device, this composition has a short 16 bar form with the first 4 bars being a series of chromatically descending chords. My arrangement concept was to play those first 4 bars of the form out of time at the beginning of each repeated chorus, both for the melody and the improvisation. I use this device in a small group arrangement of this work, I find that as the tonalities of the 4 descending chromatic chords are so distinct, it is very clear when changing from one chord to the next, this clarity should also make my form and phrasing intentions clear in solo performance.

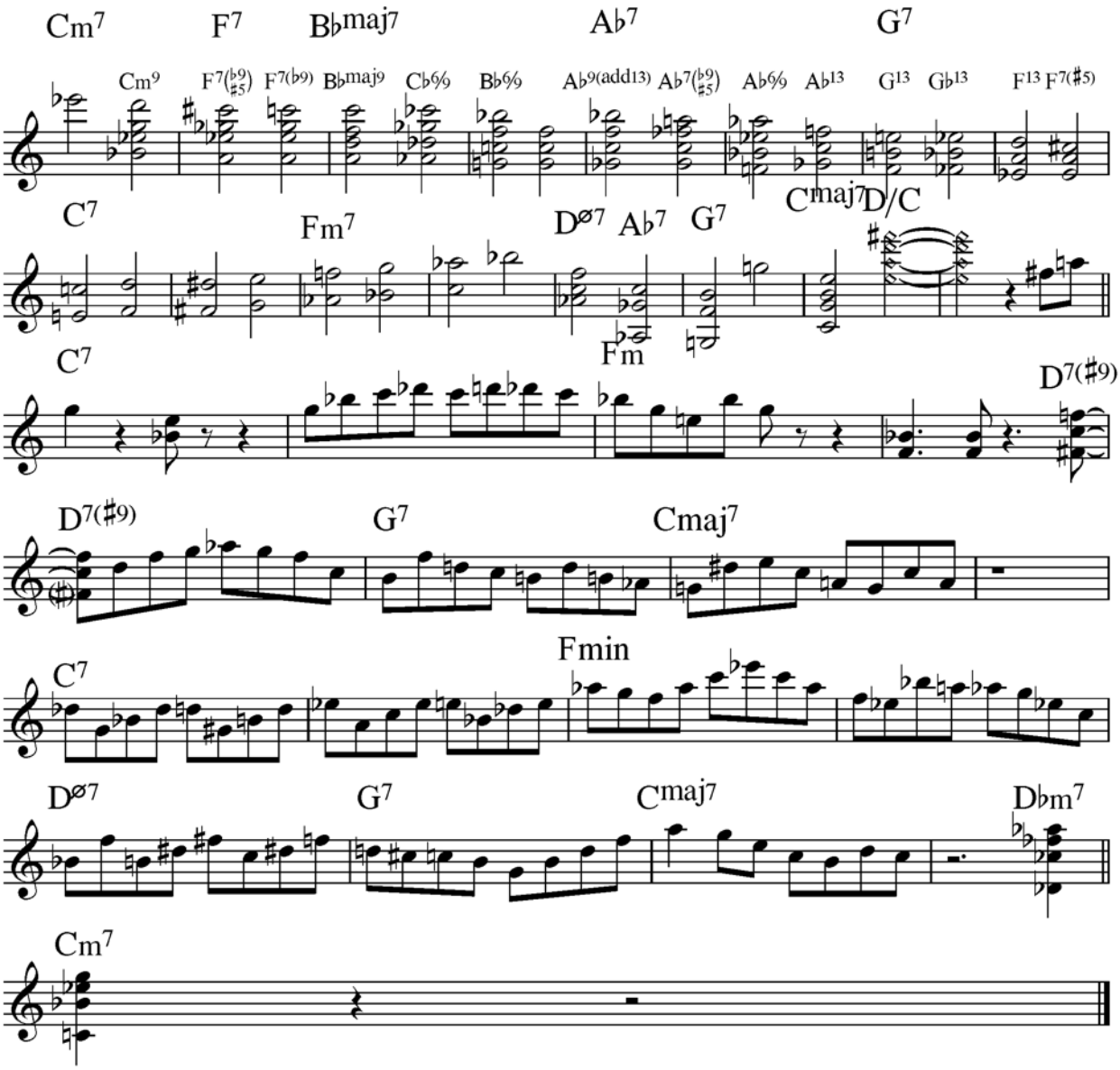
This composition is suited to the first 4 bars being played rubato and the remaining 12 bars being played as a slow bossa nova. However, as the form is so short I found myself having to swap between the rubato sections and the tempo sections too often, potentially disrupting the overall flow. The melody at the end was played all in time to contrast the stop/start nature of the rest of the piece, giving a sense of release and allowing the song to open up and flow in a more natural manner.

The rubato sections and slow pulses of ‘Inutil Paisagem’ and ‘Autumn In New York’ were part of an overall concept to broaden the range of tempos throughout the recital. At the other end of the tempo spectrum is my arrangement of Cole Porter’s ‘What Is This Thing Called Love’. This piece was played at around 300 beats per minute (bpm) and was an attempt to find the extreme ends of possible tempos for me in a solo context. It is not uncommon for me to regularly play tempos upward of 300 bpm in ensemble situations but keeping a faster pulse strong and clear without the assistance of bass and drums is very challenging. It’s interesting to observe in audio example 12 and figure 21 the similar textural elements in both the very slow and very fast, the variety in this example comes from the different time feels but not texturally, melodically or harmonically.

These specific arrangement techniques were introduced after identifying a lack of tempo variety in the first recital, it is interesting to analyse some of the solutions attempted and how a broader range of tempos affected the core concepts of this study.

Audio Ex 12

Fig. 21



When playing solo at this very fast tempo much of my thinking is occupied with maintaining the pulse and form but as demonstrated in this transcription the basic elements of this study are still present. There are clear examples of “Melodic Chords” in the first 8 bars, a simple harmonised descending and ascending line with the harmony clearly outlined on beat 1 of the chord change. When the passage becomes

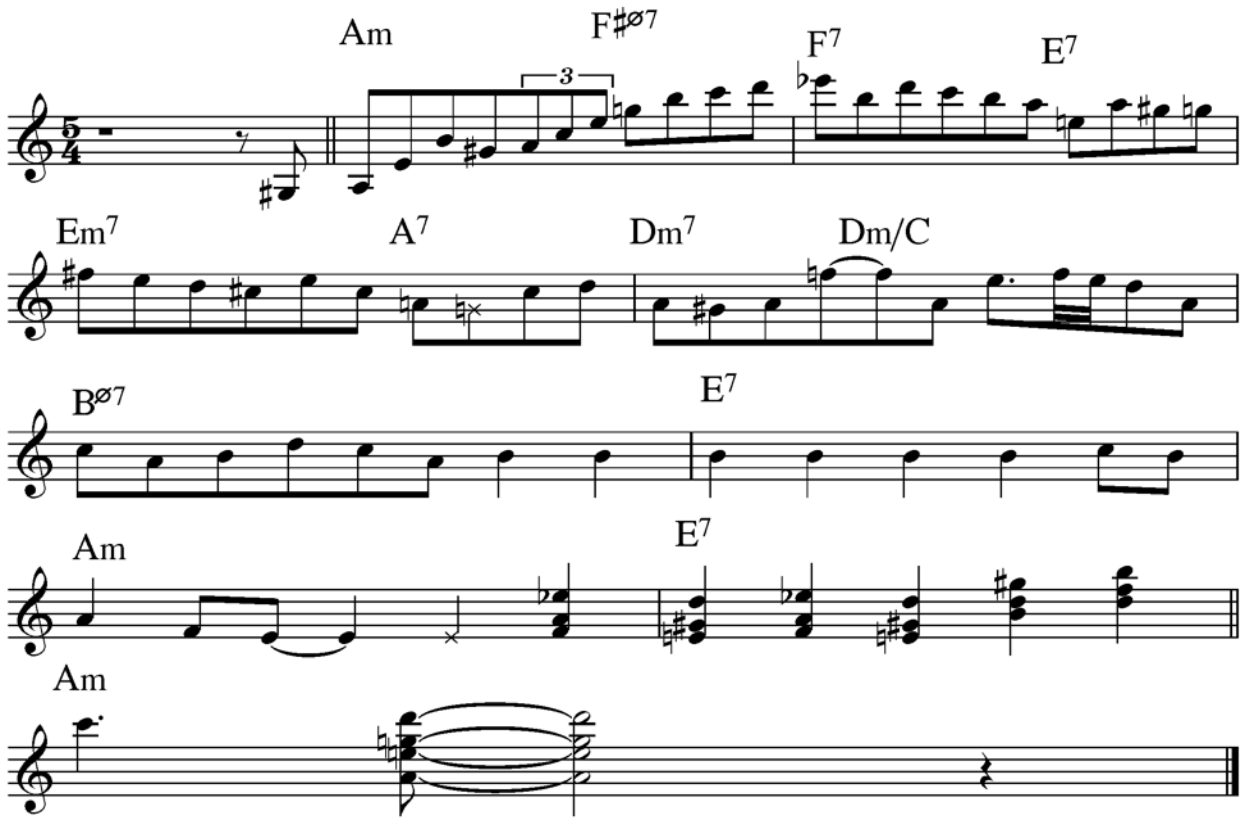
linear, there are strong points of “Harmonic Melody”, many examples of chord tones on beat 1 and some examples of semitones across the bar line, which demonstrates strong voice-leading and forward motion.

In recital one I played an original composition, ‘Domestic Arts’. This composition is in 5/4 and uses the common 3:2 clave as a basic element in the melody and accompaniment. As discussed in the previous chapter, the strong 3:2 clave continued throughout my improvising and when listening critically I felt that the clave dominated my rhythmic organisation and became too predictable.

In recital two, the composition I chose to present in 5/4 was ‘Lullaby of the Leaves’ (Petkere, 1954), a standard 32 bar AABA form song, which I played in A minor. My observations about my odd-time performances in previous recitals led me to consider the dominance of constant rhythmic claves and I was conscious of trying to expand and vary my rhythmic organisation. After critical listening of my second recital performance, I found only a handful of instances where I was not clearly stating the clave, either as a melody or accompanying figure. The main ways I avoided the explicit stating of the clave was by playing a longer, uninterrupted phrase of quavers and/or crotchets. Even though the crotchet and quaver based phrase observed in example 13 and figure 22 is not organised around the clave in an obvious rhythmic way, it still clearly outlines the 5/4-time signature by note choice, strong chord tones most commonly falling on beats one or four, which are the main beats of the 5/4 clave.

Audio Ex 13

Fig. 22



As stated earlier in this study, it is a challenge to be free with rhythmic ideas when improvising using odd-meters. I am more occupied with the number of beats in the bar than when improvising in the more common 4/4 or 3/4, so the tendency is to be rhythmically conservative and pattern-based, this concept will continue to be addressed in subsequent recitals.

Variety of Repertoire

Choosing repertoire for a performance of this nature is problematic, I may choose a wide variety of material upon which to improvise but the majority of the recital consists of improvisations by the same "composer", that is, me.

Although the classical guitar repertoire is relatively small compared to the large repertoire written for piano or violin, it spans many eras and styles. A solo classical guitarist can choose from this repertoire and naturally have inherent variety in the performance due to the various stylistic and compositional traits of different composers from different eras.

With this concept of repertoire from different eras in mind, I chose 'Wrapped Around Your Finger' by The Police, a pop song from 1983. The 1980s are generally not regarded as a common source for jazz repertoire, so on the surface it would appear to be an unusual choice. However, when I interpret the song my approach becomes similar to any other harmonised melody from any era. Any stylistic or specific elements from music of that period are negated by my interpretation, any reference to the sounds of the original recording are in the minds of the listeners.

In order to ascertain the value of this repertoire choice in terms of variety I need to break the piece down to its basic elements:

1. Harmony- The progression is a simple, open progression with the verse being an A minor chord moving to an E minor chord, the chorus also in A minor,

although not containing an A minor chord moves through a simple diatonic progression. I use the verse chords to improvise then there is an interesting re-harmonisation of the verse melody before the chorus again to finish.

2. Melody-A strongly recognisable melody using some large intervals, very diatonically rooted in A minor.
3. Rhythm-Straight pulse-based accompaniment and a freer floating melody; I reference many of the rhythmic ideas from the original recording but refrain from playing specific rhythm "parts".

There is nothing specifically recognisable as 1980s pop music from any of those basic features. However, analysing the music in this way is useful as it eliminates the original reference that I am hearing when I play the piece, this allows me to clearly ascertain if the repertoire choice is valid from a variety perspective.

By breaking each composition down to the basic elements of harmony, melody and rhythm I am able to choose the widest possible range of repertoire without being influenced by extra-musical or cultural factors. Figure 23 is a comparison of two pieces I selected for my recital, 'Wrapped Around Your Finger' and the George Shearing composition 'Conception' One is a pop song from 1983, the other an instrumental jazz composition from 1950. Superficially they would appear to be stylistically different, but it is not until you analyse the elements of the composition on a deeper level that you discover core variations in the compositions.

Fig 23.

	Wrapped Around Your Finger	Conception
Harmony	Simple, open, slow-moving diatonic harmonic scheme	Dense, fast-moving chromatic harmonic scheme with unusual phrase structure.
Melody	Vocal melody, repetitive, with an emphasis on long notes.	Quaver-based linear melody, based on bebop language.
Rhythm	Part based, straight rock feel.	Medium-fast improvised swing based feel.

Understanding of the basic structure of a composition is important for improvising, as this is the framework upon which we build our personal interpretation of the piece. In the following examples, we can hear how these basic elements impact the rhythmic, textural, melodic and dynamic approaches I take to my improvising.

Audio Ex 14 (Excerpt from ‘Wrapped Around Your Finger’)

Audio example 14 shows how the simple harmonic scheme allows for a slow building dynamic, as the chord progression is only providing a repeated two bar

pattern I have to shape the larger dynamic scheme. The nature of the composition is also evident in the improvising, my improvised melodies tend to use the same fundamentals, more long notes and repetition when compared with other improvisations.

Audio Ex 15 Excerpt from ‘Conception’

Audio example 15 however, shows how the fast-moving harmonic scheme in ‘Conception’ doesn’t allow phrases to settle, the restless progression not resolving until the last bar of each 12 bar A section. This tends to encourage shorter phrases with less motivic development. The texture is also partly governed by the harmony, as the progression is so chromatic I tend to use more chords rather than melodic lines. Again, the melodic content of the original composition shapes the melodic content of the improvising, making variety of repertoire a very useful tool in creating overall variety throughout the recital.

Variety of articulation and tonal variation

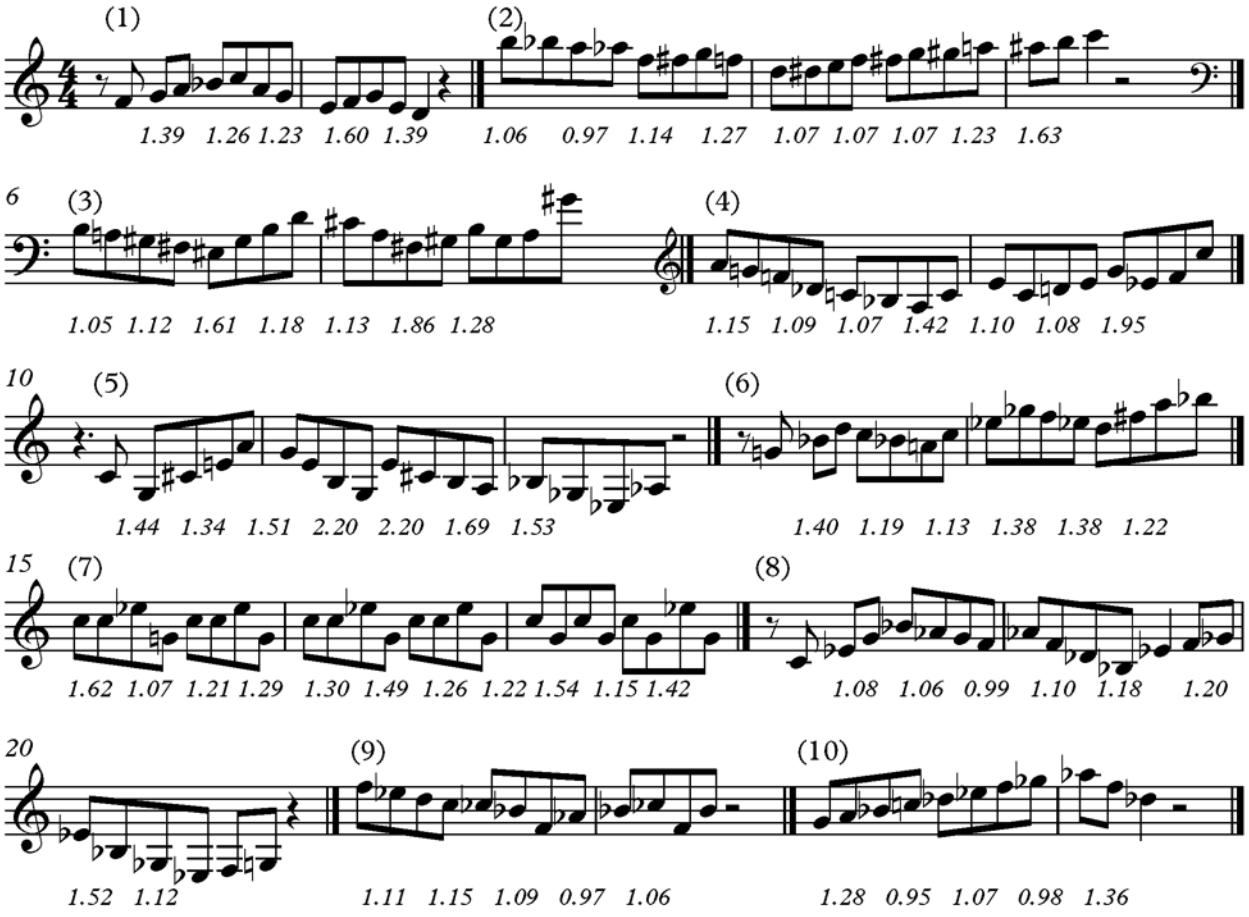
There is considerable variation and rhythmic interest created through articulation, especially in relation to swung quavers.

Fernando Benadon states in his work “Slicing the Beat: Jazz Eighth-Notes as Expressive Micro-Rhythm” that, “The rhythmic unevenness of the eighth-note is one

of the hallmarks of jazz" (Benadon, 2006: 74). Figure 24 is an example of his analysis of the subtle relationships between the beat and upbeat in the improvising of a range of historical jazz figures. Using sound editing software Benadon categorises the relationship between beat and upbeat from 1:0 (completely straight quavers) to 2:0 (the standard notated swing quaver, quaver triplets with the first quaver tied to the middle quaver).

Fig. 24

(1) Bud Powell, piano, "Sometimes I'm Happy" (153 bpm), from *Jazz Giant*, Verve P2 29937; (2) Red Garland, piano, "It Could Happen to You" (188 bpm), from *Relaxin' with the Miles Davis Quintet*, Prestige OJCCD-190-2; (3) Charlie Parker, alto sax, "Now's the Time" (167 bpm), from *Charlie Parker at Storyville*, Blue Note CDP 7 851082; (4) Phil Woods, alto sax, "Pennies from Heaven" (184 bpm), from *Bird Calls Vol. 1*, Savoy Jazz ZDS 1179; (5) Joe Henderson, tenor sax, "Isotope" (188 bpm), from *Inner Urge*, Blue Note CDP 584189; (6) Jimmy Hamilton, clarinet, "Trumpet No End" (224 bpm), from *Duke Ellington and His Orchestra: The Golden Duke* (Prestige 24029); (7) Wayne Shorter, tenor sax, "Speak No Evil"(142 bpm), *Speak No Evil*, Blue Note CDP 746509 2; (8) Lester Young, tenor sax, "You're Driving Me Crazy" (116 bpm), from *The Complete 136-1951 Small Group Sessions Vol. 4 (1946-1949)*, Blue Moon BMCD 1004; (9) Roy Eldridge, trumpet, "Big Shoe" (128 bpm), from *Duke Ellington and Johnny Hodges Side by Side*, Verve 821578-2; (10) Freddie Hubbard, trumpet, "Speak No Evil"(142 bpm), *Speak No Evil*, Blue Note CDP 746509 2.



As Benadon's research shows, there is variation in the length of quavers from player to player and from note to note which forms a large part of each player's personal sound and further reinforces the importance of learning jazz as an aural tradition.

As well as these "micro-rhythmic" concepts, Audio example 16 demonstrates the use a variety of accents and legato to create rhythmic interest using the swung quaver. This excerpt is the melody statement and first section of the improvisation from my performance of 'Dewey Square'.

Audio Ex 16

The predominant rhythm is the quaver and in this example, a variety of articulation and micro-rhythms are used to avoid quaver lines sounding mechanical and lifeless.

Tonal variation is an important factor in my solo performances. I am playing the same instrument directly plugged into an amplifier with no electronic effects, the variation in tone has to come from acoustically based tone production. Due to acoustic nature of the arch top guitar I am able to use techniques often employed by classical guitarists as they too need a broad tonal palette.

The following two examples are from ‘Wrapped Around Your Finger’. Audio example 17 demonstrates splitting the guitar into two distinct parts, the open string bass figure is muted by the palm of my right hand, with the treble strings allowed to ring out, creating a tonal contrast between the upper and lower register.

Audio Ex 17

Audio example 18 is an example of *ponticello,* a string technique where the string is plucked closer to the bridge resulting in a thinner more nasal tone quality.

Audio Ex 18

The overall mood and tempo of a piece directly influences tone and articulation, for example in the slow rubato interpretation of ‘Autumn in New York’ my aim is to achieve the fullest, roundest tone possible by placing my right hand close to the neck of the guitar (*tasto*) and maximising lyricism in the melody by sliding between notes

to create a singing, legato effect. The slower tempo also leads to a more relaxed right hand which gives a fuller rounder tone as opposed to the biting attack of the quaver lines in the faster tempos.

Playing this piece with no regular pulse allows for these tonal and lyrical concepts. Without the requirement of having a "deadline" to complete each phrase within two or four bars lets the performer focus more on expressive elements. At faster tempos however, the tonal focus and articulation is different, with the articulation and rhythmic subdivisions as clear and strong as possible with accents to create variety and interest. Audio example 19 is a passage from the up-tempo interpretation of 'What Is This Thing Called Love' in which I am prioritizing the clarity of the pulse by using simple crotchet, crotchet triplet and quaver subdivisions.

Audio Ex 19

There are other techniques specific to the guitar that I practised and consciously included in my performance to ensure I was addressing what I considered to be the lack of variety in the first recital. Audio example 20 is from 'Wrapped Around Your Finger'. The reason for its inclusion is to demonstrate the effectiveness of using wide leaps of register, ensuring I was utilising the entire range of the instrument. Other guitar-specific techniques in this short excerpt include the use of natural harmonics and open string chord voicings; these techniques have distinct tonal characteristics and add to the overall colour.

Audio Ex 20

Natural harmonics are used throughout the recital and are used not only as a tone colour but also as a harmonic device. Audio example 21 is a specific example of this, the seventh fret natural harmonics on the top three strings spell out the upper extensions of a C major 7 sharp 11 chord, used in ‘What Is This Thing Called Love’, ‘Conception’ and this example from ‘Autumn in New York’

Audio Ex 21

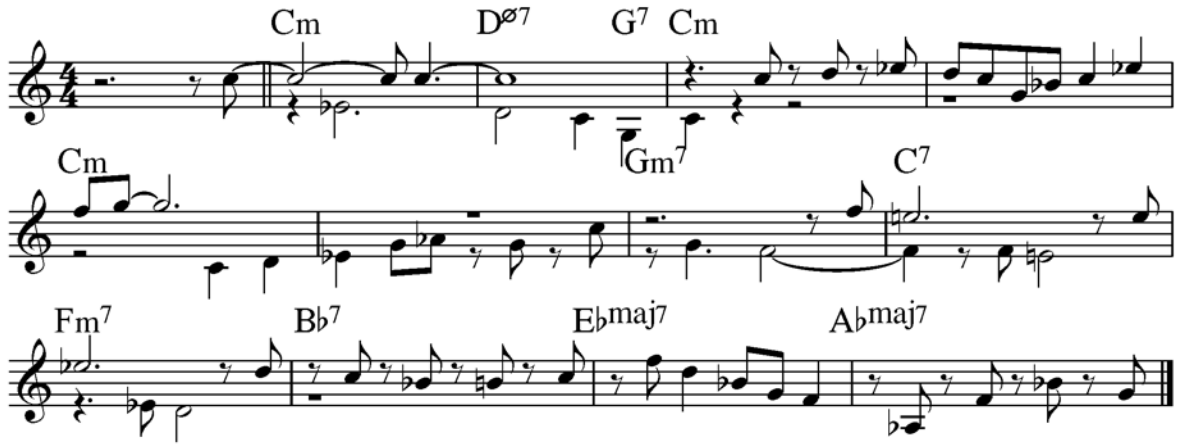
Throughout my playing career I have always benefitted from listening to my own recordings and advised students to do the same, this study has allowed me to delve deeply into my own playing through listening and detailed critical analysis. The techniques investigated in this chapter have been particularly helpful to my development as I was able to specifically target problems and devise solutions which then became concrete concepts that I could incorporate into my practice.

Chapter 5: Recital Three-New Developments and Refinement of Core Concepts

This study was undertaken over a three-year period and the changes in my improvising are documented by the recordings which demonstrate the progression of my playing throughout this project. Always present are the four core ideas outlined in Chapter 1, but there are newer concepts present in the third recital that were not as apparent in the first or second performances. During this study, my practice involved multi voice melodic counterpoint and I slowly introduced this into my improvising. This concept is common and natural to pianists, and a focus of this study was to find ways to adapt it to the guitar. It is possible to apply this concept to a range of playing contexts but it is ideally suited to the solo improvised format. An example of this is from the opening of the improvisation on ‘Get Out of Town’. As this is a newer concept for me the contrapuntal voices are presented very simply, as observed in audio example 22 and figure 25. There is very little interweaving of the melodic phrases but an encouraging start to exploring a rich and interesting improvising texture.

Audio Ex 22

Fig. 25



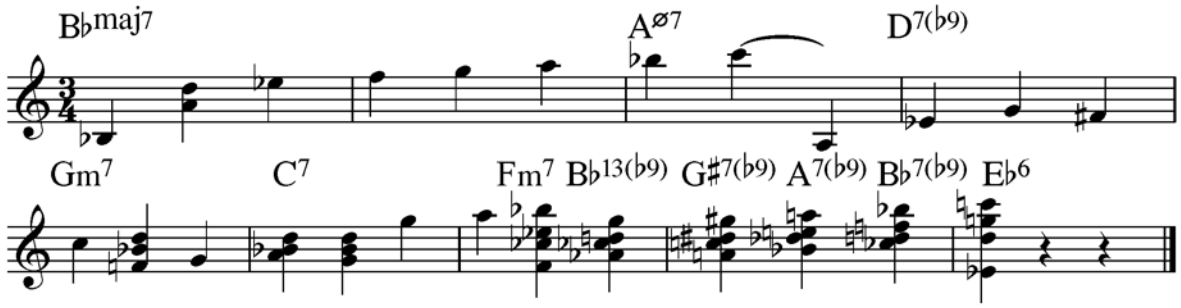
A noticeable refinement for me was my willingness to approach the third recital with virtually no specific arrangement ideas. This third recital contained the least pre-conceived melodic arrangement ideas when compared to previous recitals. This was not due to lack of organisation or lack of preparation but a conscious effort to blend the melodies of the songs with the improvised sections. As stated in my analysis of recital two, “the advantages in being able to respond to the overall flow and dynamic of each piece in real time, far outweighs (for me) the possible risk of the piece breaking down due to lack of structure”. I used this thinking when choosing the program for this performance. The compositions I chose are in my general repertoire but not pieces I had played before in a solo context.

A clear demonstrable advantage of this lack of pre-conception is in my freedom to shape the overall dynamic of each piece. In any performance, stating the melody is very important but I am not using the melodic statement as a feature section, so then

the improvising can lead naturally out of the melody. In ‘Bluesette’ for example, the melodic material is developed throughout the improvising. As such it would be tempting to arrange this simple melody using a variety of arranging techniques such as complex harmonic substitutions and melodic and harmonic contrary motion. Although these arranging techniques are of interest, it would be a difficult task to follow a complex arrangement with solo improvised guitar. Audio example 23 and figure 26 are taken from my solo on ‘Bluesette’, the simple ascending crotchet melody is developed in a variety of ways, through transposition, register and chromaticism.

Audio Ex 23

Fig. 26



This also connects to the importance placed on variety, by using the individual elements of each composition as source material, the improvisation will be directly linked to the composition being played, rather than a generic solo over chord changes. Also of note in this excerpt is the harmonic and rhythmic displacement throughout the phrase, using harmonic tensions on the first beats of bars 3 and 7 and

displacing traditional 3/4 bass to chord relationships gives the phrase interest and tension.

The dynamic advantages of not having a pre-conceived arrangement are demonstrated in ‘Get Out of Town’. I have taken short excerpts from various points throughout the performance. If the texture and volume of the introduction and the first melodic statement are compared with various sections throughout the piece, it can be heard how the melodic statement is part of the overall dynamic of the performance. This series of excerpts also demonstrates the inherent dynamism of the arch-top guitar. Audio example 24 is from the introduction (0:00 to 0:22) and is dynamically the quietest section of the performance, setting the overall mood and tempo.

Audio Ex 24

Audio example 25 is taken from the first melodic statement (00:39 - 1:00) it demonstrates a clear simple statement of the melody accompanied by chords and a descending contrapuntal line.

Audio Ex 25

Audio example 26 is taken from early in the solo (1:30-1:50). I included this section as it demonstrates how the solo organically grows out of the melodic statement. If the melody was complexly arranged, there could be a potentially awkward transition between arranged and improvised material.

Audio Ex 26

Audio example 27 (3:44 - 4:04) is from further into the solo, again, clearly demonstrating the slowly building dynamic of the performance.

Audio Ex 27

Audio example 28 (4:26-4:40) shows not only more texture but also more aggressive articulation and rhythmic attack.

Audio Ex 28

The final longer excerpt (audio example 29) is from the peak of the solo at 5:16. At this stage of the piece I am using many techniques to maintain intensity. Techniques such as an aggressive and rhythmically dynamic pick attack, dense texture and the use of the full range of the instrument.

Audio Ex 29

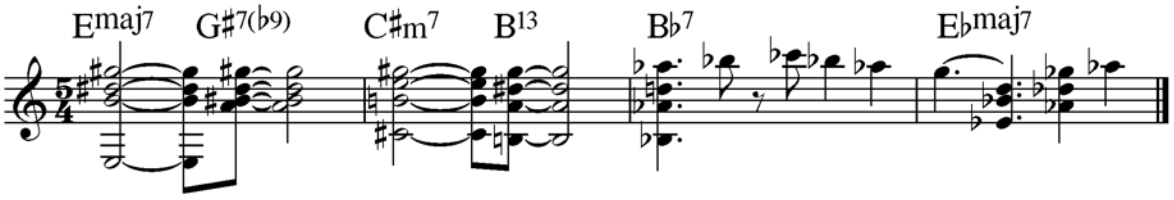
The excerpt then includes a decrease in intensity leading to the ending melodic statement. I included this section to highlight the way in which the melody flows out of the improvisation. As there is no pre-conceived arrangement, the melodic interpretation at the end of the piece differs from the opening statement and is a natural part of the overall dynamic shape of the whole performance, rather than jumping from an improvised section back to a set arrangement.

My inclusion of at least one odd-time piece in every recital has been an integral part of this study. In recital one I identified the lack of rhythmic variety in the improvised section of my 5/4 composition ‘Domestic Arts’. I concluded that the majority of my rhythmic organisation was based on a common rhythmic clave. A rhythmic clave is somewhat unavoidable when there is a change in harmony occurring in the one bar, ‘Con Alma’ is an example of this, when played in 5/4 most of the bars contain a chord change. When improvising, this means having to play one chord for two beats and the other for three or vice versa. Constantly swapping between 2:3 clave and 3:2 clave is rhythmically disjointed and seriously interrupts the overall groove and flow, so I tried some specific rhythmic concepts to help inject some interest.

The first concept is to split the bar of five beats into two even two and a half beat divisions, this breaks the repetitive nature of the clave without being too disruptive to the overall groove and creates a nice ambiguous rhythmic effect especially when used at the beginning of the piece, as demonstrated in audio example 30 with figure 27.

Audio Ex 30

Fig. 27

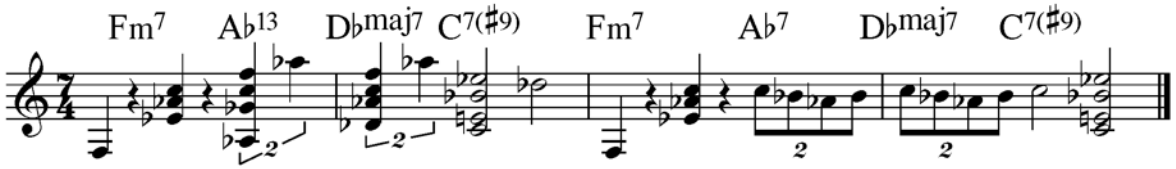


I specifically swapped claves in my performance of ‘Here’s that Rainy Day’ which I played in 7/4. Playing in 7/4 has the same clave issues as 5/4 when dealing with chord changes.

Audio example 31 (figure 28) is from the introduction to the piece. The first bar of the phrase is 4:3 clave and the second bar 3:4, I then add another layer of rhythmic interest by playing an even group of two or four notes over the 3-beat section, this works when playing chords or melody.

Audio Ex 31

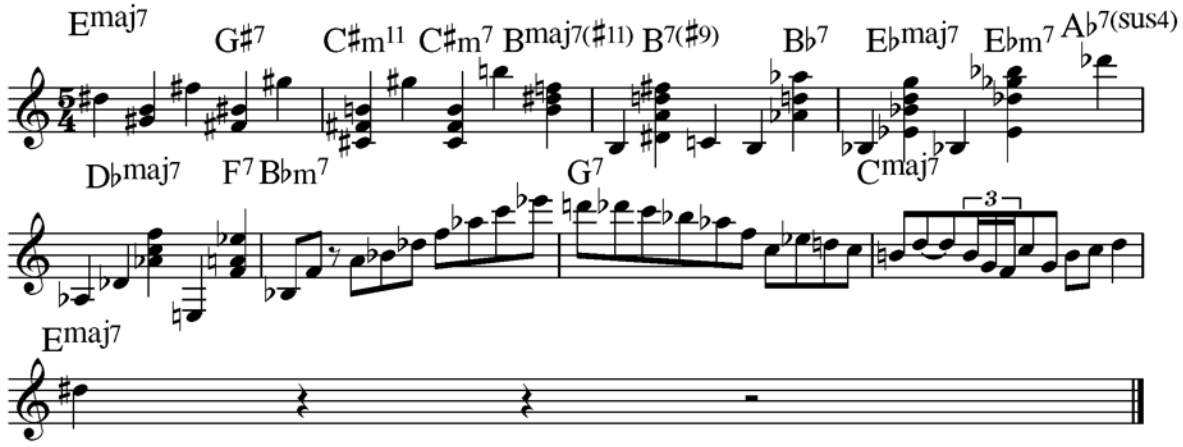
Fig 28



Using these pre-conceived concepts is not the end in itself but helps me to develop an independence from the dominance of the clave. In audio example 32 (figure 29) from my solo in ‘Con Alma’, there are specific rhythmic concepts such as grouping the 5 beats in groups of 2 but also a more natural rhythmic awareness, there are fewer resolutions on beat one throughout the phrase and very few rhythmic ideas directly referring to the clave.

Audio Ex 32

Fig. 29



After analysing the first recital and identifying limitations with my rhythmic variety when improvising in odd meters, it is encouraging to hear how the introduction of these specific concepts such as the rhythmic groupings mentioned above are contributing to a freer, more natural approach to my odd meter improvising.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The key components to the success of integrated chordal and melodic playing have relevance beyond just solo performance, they are also applicable to many ensemble situations.

In the Literature Review I cited examples of players using integrated concepts in ensemble situations, such as Jim Hall on the Sonny Rollins recording *The Bridge* and the Peter Bernstein trio recording *Monk*. The common thread running through these recordings is that there is no other chordal instrument present, the majority of the chordal role (as well as a substantial contribution to the melodic role) is the guitar's responsibility.

The exclusive use of the solo format in this study was a way to focus on the key components and is in my opinion, the best way to really hear all the elements of the guitar with great clarity. I could have chosen a variety of ensemble situations to demonstrate these ideas but due to the concentrated nature of this study, solo performance was the ideal platform.

For example, in a guitar-bass-drums trio, I would apply all of the main focus areas of this study

1. Melodic Chords/Harmonic Melodies

2. Integration of Melodic and Chordal Playing (self-accompaniment and phrasing concepts)
3. Deep Understanding of the Material
4. Rhythmic Drive/Time Feel/Forward Motion

There would be adjustments made to each category to account for the different instrumentation. For example, I wouldn't feel the need to be *as* explicit with rhythmic or harmonic clarity due to the presence of the drums and bass, although, a strong sense of time and motion and harmonic accuracy is vital to being a valuable contributing ensemble member.

Just as the key components for success are relevant to ensemble playing, the problem of variety is also an issue for guitar based ensembles. Rhythmic variety, variety of repertoire, variety of articulation and tonal variation are just as relevant when applied to an ensemble situation. Also relevant is insuring each composition has its own character and overall dynamic flow, this is vital for interactive, ensemble based improvisation. Shaping the dynamics of the entire piece (as demonstrated in the excerpts from my performance of 'Get Out of Town'), can be more difficult when there are more ensemble members with potentially different ideas, but strong, clear ideas from the soloist will guide the ensemble. This leads me to surmise that one of the most important concepts from this study that can be applied to playing situations other than solo performance is the need for there to be a lack of preconception. The ability to respond instantly and have the available rhythmic, harmonic, melodic and

textural language to spontaneously react in different musical situations is fundamental to jazz improvisation and vital to being a valuable member of any improvising ensemble.

In the Literature Review section of this work I highlighted the lack of teaching methods that explicitly outlined concepts for an integrated approach to chordal and melodic playing. Elements of this study could be used to formulate a series of studies designed for the intermediate to advanced guitar student wishing to pursue these ideas. I found discussing this study with my students and fellow guitarists was a good way to clarify my thinking and focus on the core concepts.

The majority of this work contains guitar-specific material that may be of superficial interest to improvisers playing other instruments. Further, many of the core guitar concepts are not genre-specific, these guitar-based concepts are open to being developed by guitarists regardless of genre. I have cited the influence of classical guitar works on this study, but the integration of chordal and melodic playing is a feature of many styles of guitar, including blues, rock, pop and many folk styles.

This practice-based study has reinforced certain concepts for me but also provoked self-reflection in other areas, I believe it is beneficial for musicians at any stage of their development to honestly evaluate all aspects of their musical output.

Above and beyond the detailed specific concepts of this study, the main conclusion I have made is the need for flexibility. The flexibility to be able to take on any role (melodic, chordal, rhythmic, textural) at any time, each of the four detailed concepts outlined in Chapter 3 serve this overall purpose.

1. Melodic Chords/Harmonic Melodies: being harmonically precise with melody enables me to clearly outline the progression without the need to actually state the chords; conversely, ensuring my chordal playing has a clear melodic focus enables me to use a denser chordal texture without losing melodic interest; this allows me to be flexible with texture.

2. Integration of Melodic and Chordal Playing; again, this is a vital concept to enable flexibility and leads from the Melodic Chords/Harmonic Melodies idea; integrated melodic and chordal playing allows me to easily switch from melody to accompaniment roles as my thinking is not exclusively “melodic” (single-line) or “chordal” but a combination of the two, one informing the other.

3. Deep Understanding of the Material: an essential component for improvisation in any context. An improviser cannot fully develop their ideas with any freedom if their thinking is occupied with the details of the material they are using to improvise.

4. Rhythmic Drive/Time Feel/Forward Motion: In order to create rhythmic interest and variation these more fundamental aspects need to be solid, as outlined in Chapter 4 using Benadon's study, there is much rhythmic flexibility in jazz even within the basic quaver.

There are fundamental aspects to successful solo performance that I have not addressed in this study. I approached this study at a high level of performance with the more basic musical aspects, such as playing in time and keeping the form being assumed. Needless to say, without mastery of these fundamental aspects, the overall concept of flexibility is redundant. There are of course examples in the recital recordings of me unintentionally increasing the tempo ('Blues the Most' in recital one) and playing the occasional bar of 6/4 in my 5/4 interpretation of 'Lullaby of Leaves' from recital two, but as frustrating as these mistakes are to me when listening, they generally fall into an acceptable margin for such errors and don't impact the overall performance.

My observations on lack of variety in Chapter 4 were a result of objectively listening to my recital performances repeatedly over a relatively short space of time. Listeners accustomed to orchestral music or heavily layered and produced popular music would of course find a simple solo guitar recital to be lacking in variety so I am not seeking to place my performances in this context. Rather, I am trying to compare similar performance situations such as solo classical guitar, violin or violoncello recitals, even comparing the guitar with solo piano finds the guitar lacking in harmonic and textural variety possibilities.

Analysis of this negative aspect was very useful to this study as it provoked self-reflection on the whole solo performance concept and made me consider my repertoire choices in more depth and expand my rhythmic and tonal palette.

This study contains personal answers to some of the questions raised around solo guitar performance. These answers are not intended as definitive or complete solutions. They are based on developing the skills required to make improvised musical choices, ongoing development of these skills could form the basis for further study. There may be more thorough or more complete solutions available through pre-conceived arrangement and composition but being able to respond to the flow of what is happening musically at any given time is at the heart of being a jazz musician.

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